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Victorian Biography and the Representation of 'Obscure' Lives

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Thesis submitted for a PhD degree

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Abstract

In 1940, Virginia Woolf called for a more inclusive form of biography, which would include 'the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious'. She did so partly as a reaction against Victorian biography, deemed to have been overly preoccupied with the great and the heroic.

Yet a significant number of Victorian biographers did in fact write biographies that went against the trend of hero-worshipping 'Great Lives' and focused instead on the humble, the marginal, or the neglected. Though many are simplistic, pious productions, others sought to engage in contemporary debates surrounding the role and place of the individual in society in a sophisticated and complex manner.

The thesis begins with an overview of the period's biographical writings. The second and third chapters explore the representation of marginality and powerlessness through biographies of female and working-class subjects. The fourth and fifth chapters are concerned with issues of canonisation: the championing of neglected artists, and the *Dictionary of National Biography* are discussed. A final, brief, chapter on Virginia Woolf's conception of 'obscure lives' seeks to broaden our understanding of her literary influences. The 'obscure' biographical subject emerges as a paradoxical figure used as a safe means of exploring the boundary between the private and the public. Above all, and in contrast with the trend instigated by Woolf, biographers were not concerned with securing immortality for their subjects, but with prompting within their readers feelings of empathy and gratitude.

The thesis attempts to balance a survey of this trend with close analysis of works that manipulated the biographical genre in interesting ways. It is also a study of how Thomas Carlyle's and George Eliot's influence was disseminated within an under-studied literary genre.

The thesis includes, as an appendix, a descriptive catalogue of over two hundred Victorian biographies.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| ASR | <i>The Anglo-Saxon Review</i> |
| BEM | <i>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine</i> |
| CR | <i>The Contemporary Review</i> |
| CM | <i>Cornhill Magazine</i> |
| DC | <i>Descriptive Catalogue</i> |
| DNB | <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> |
| ER | <i>Edinburgh Review</i> |
| ESC | <i>English Studies in Canada</i> |
| FM | <i>Fraser's Magazine</i> |
| FR | <i>Fortnightly Review</i> |
| JSSL | <i>Journal of the Statistical Society of London</i> |
| JVC | <i>Journal of Victorian Culture</i> |
| LWR | <i>The London and Westminster Review</i> |
| MM | <i>Macmillan's Magazine</i> |
| NCP | <i>Nineteenth-Century Prose</i> |
| NM | <i>National Magazine</i> |
| ODNB | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> |
| PR | <i>Prose Studies</i> |
| QR | <i>Quarterly Review</i> |
| SC | <i>Science in Context</i> |
| SR | <i>Saturday Review</i> |
| TB | <i>Temple Bar</i> |
| TCL | <i>Twentieth-Century Literature</i> |
| WR | <i>The Westminster Review</i> |

Notes

1. The following thesis has grown out of a study of over two hundred biographies. Many of the themes discussed in the main body of the text are treated in a similar fashion by contemporary biographies that, though often interesting in their own right, could not be considered at length. In cases where trends reached across a wide number of works, I have given a reference to the appropriate biographies in the descriptive catalogue, situated in the appendix. Biographies in the appendix have been catalogued chronologically, and each has a unique number. References to the catalogue are made as follows: D.C no. 1.

2. Footnotes are only given in their complete form (Location: Publisher, Date) for primary works, namely biographies published between 1830 and 1901. All other works are referenced by location and publication date only.

Introduction

In 1940, Virginia Woolf called for more biographies of ‘the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious’.¹ Over fifty years later, Catherine Peters argued that ‘full-scale biographies of these ‘secondary lives’ are becoming more common’.² It is usual to trace the origins of this trend for celebrating marginal lives – of which Claire Tomalin’s *The Invisible Woman* (1990) is perhaps the best-known example – back to Virginia Woolf. There is a similar understanding that Woolf’s stance involved a vigorous rejection of Victorian biographers, who relentlessly pursued the nineteenth century’s ‘preoccupation with “Great Men”’.³ This thesis aims to demonstrate that biographical interest in ‘obscure lives’ did not originate with the ‘new biographers’ of the early twentieth century, but developed instead in the nineteenth century, when the fashion developed at a rate that took many critics by surprise.

A study of Victorian biographies of ‘obscure’ men and women poses numerous problems of definition. Biographers and critics varied in the terms they used to describe these subjects: ‘second-rate’, ‘mediocre’, ‘forgotten’, and ‘neglected’ were all used. Virginia Woolf’s own label, ‘obscure’, was the most frequently employed, and will be used here. It has

¹ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Art of Biography’, *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life* (London, 1993), p. 150.

² Catherine Peters, ‘Secondary Lives: Biography in Context’, in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (Oxford, 1995), p. 49.

³ Laura Marcus, ‘The Newness of the ‘New Biography’’, in *Mapping Lives: the Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St. Clair (Oxford, 2002), p. 198.

the advantage of avoiding the judgement of value implicit in ‘second-rate’ and ‘mediocre’, and of placing the emphasis on the subject rather than on the attitude of an onlooker, as with ‘forgotten’ and ‘neglected’. Nevertheless, obscurity is a relative rather than a stable category, and the ranks of the ‘obscure’ could be said to include individuals of local but not national importance, men or women who were once famous but whose renown had dissipated, or those who had never attracted public notice of any kind. It is impossible to draw the line between fame and obscurity with any precision. However, what all of the biographies considered below have in common is that they describe their subject in contrast with the idea of fame. To some extent, the lives are therefore defined negatively, as simply ‘not great’. Yet many biographers placed a far more positive accent on this category, and perceived these lives as the site of new biographical possibilities.

These biographies were published between 1830 and 1901, though the majority appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. An opening date for this trend would be a highly artificial one, as isolated works with similar characteristics can be identified well before the beginning of the Victorian period. Robert Southey’s *The Lives of the Uneducated Poets* (1831) is a useful landmark: a turning point in the relations between ‘obscure’ subjects and the public they were presented to as biographical patronage began to replace individual benefactors. The closing date of 1901 is a sharper one, as it marks the completion of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, that Victorian monument so frequently taken as the epitome of the ‘patriarchal biographical tradition’,⁴ but which in fact placed ‘obscure’ lives at its heart.

The ‘obscure’ subjects of these works are all contemporaries or near-contemporaries, not only because biographies of overlooked historical subjects, except in biographical dictionaries, were still rare, but also because the biographers use these subjects to raise

⁴ Peter France, ‘From Eulogy to Biography: the French Academic *Eloge*’, in *Mapping Lives*, p. 87.

questions about their age in a way that has been more commonly explored in Victorian novels and poetry. On similar grounds, and for considerations of feasibility, the subjects are all British – though an analysis of British biographies of foreign subjects would certainly be worthy of a separate investigation.

The thesis is principally concerned with exploring the paradoxes raised when a biographer uses the very public genre of biography to celebrate a previously hidden existence: how biographer and subject are brought together, how the writer justifies his choice, and what he hopes will result from such a seemingly random exhibition. For this reason, domestic biographies have been almost entirely excluded. Domestic biography undoubtedly occupied a significant portion of the biographical market, and many of the ‘obscure’ biographies published during this period were penned by mourning siblings, parents, children and spouses. Yet these grieving, and often amateur, biographers were on the whole less concerned with the marginal status of their subjects and, for the more doting authors, oblivious of it altogether. Though many interesting works were produced (some of these are considered in Christopher Tolley’s study *Domestic Biography*⁵), they were usually motivated by the less complex desire of paying tribute to a loved one – indeed, hundreds of them were only circulated in private. This general rule has been relaxed in the second chapter, on biographies of women, partly because most biographies of women were also domestic biographies, but also because several domestic biographies of women bear a very close resemblance, in both style and content, to their non-domestic counterparts.

It is essential to stress that an exhaustive survey of ‘obscure’ biography during the Victorian period has not been attempted. The fluidity of the category of the ‘obscure’ makes this impossible. Many subjects now forgotten or who we would classify as second-rate were praised by their biographers as luminaries of their age. Other biographers showed very little

⁵ Christopher Tolley, *Domestic Biography: The Legacy of Evangelicalism in Four Nineteenth-Century Families* (Oxford, 1997).

self-consciousness in taking on an 'obscure' subject, and were content to rehearse the facts of their life. A more overwhelming obstacle to an all-inclusive study is the sheer number of biographies published at this time. In 1880 alone, for example, the *Publishers' Circular* estimated that 363 biographies and histories appeared,⁶ and many of these were the two-volume 'ill-digested masses of material'⁷ so vigorously attacked by Lytton Strachey. In order to bring out significant trends and concerns, types of biographical subjects on which many works were published – such as missionaries, naturalists, and poets - have been privileged, as have biographies that display literary sophistication. However, no major work of 'obscure' biography has been consciously overlooked, and a balance has been sought between unusually complex and less stimulating but perhaps more representative works. Over two hundred biographies have been consulted for this study, and an entry on each work appears in the descriptive catalogue in the appendix. One aim of this work is to challenge the assumption that Victorian biography lacks diversity and interest.

Biography has never received the kind of sustained critical attention given to fiction, poetry or drama, and even within the area of life-writing the genre has attracted far less interest than autobiography. Autobiography and biography have frequently been grouped together, with productive results. Nevertheless, this thesis largely avoids this assimilation on the basis that biography poses different questions about, and brings a unique response to, the relationship between the subject and the public.

Studies of biography have generally belonged to one of four categories. The first category contains histories of the genre. In these, critics tend to move swiftly from Plutarch to Boswell, glide over the nineteenth century, and pause to celebrate the achievements of the 'new biographers' of the 1920s and 1930s. Harold Nicolson's 1959 *The Development of*

⁶ 'English Literature in 1880', *JSSL*, 44 (March 1881), p. 96.

⁷ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1918), p. viii.

English Biography is an early example of this type of study. Other, more insightful, histories have taken a narrower focus. Donald Stauffer's work on eighteenth-century biography, A. O. J. Cockshut's highly selective but useful account of Victorian biography and Ruth Hoberman's study of early twentieth-century 'new biographers' are all important works. Richard Altick's history of a sub-genre, literary biography, remains perhaps the key reference amongst histories of the genre.⁸ Biographies of 'obscure' subjects were published so extensively during the nineteenth century that they deserve greater attention in accounts of the period's biographical publications.

A second category consists of biographers' accounts of their craft. Many of the lions of twentieth-century biography, such as Leon Edel, Richard Ellmann and Michael Holroyd, have published such accounts. More recently, Mark Bostridge's collection, *Lives for Sale* (2004), brought together essays by some of the most important contemporary biographers, including Hermione Lee and Claire Tomalin, and redressed the masculine bias of most studies. Such discussions of biography are frequently witty and anecdotal, with reminiscences of recalcitrant relatives, discovered manuscripts, and the type of analysis of the biographer's relationship with his subject that Richard Holmes is particularly associated with. Though lively, these studies tend to offer similar conclusions and privilege one aspect of biography – the biographer's relation with his subject – to the exclusion of others.⁹

Whereas these autobiographical accounts of biography largely avoid theoretical discussions of the genre, the third group of studies is preoccupied almost entirely with addressing the generic questions biography raises: is biography an art or a craft? is there such

⁸ Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London, 1959); Donald Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1941); A. O. J., Cockshut, *Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1974); Ruth Hoberman, *Modernizing Lives: Experiments in Biography, 1918-1939* (Carbondale, 1987); Richard Altick, *Lives and Letters: a History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York, 1965).

⁹ Leon Edel, *Literary Biography* (London, 1957); Richard Ellmann, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (London, 1973); Michael Holroyd, *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography* (Washington, DC, 2002); Mark Bostridge (ed.), *Lives for Sale: Biographers' Tales* (London, 2004); Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London, 1985).

a thing as truth in biography? how should a biographer structure his biography? Ira Bruce Nadel's *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (1984) and William Epstein's studies are significant examples of these, and offer the most sophisticated theoretical approaches. Such works demonstrated that biography could benefit from close readings and stressed the complexity of the genre.¹⁰

It is with the fourth and most recent category that this study aligns itself. In the last ten years, critics have investigated the social role of biography and the manner in which the genre articulates, or responds to, contemporary ideas on a wide range of institutions and identities. Victorian biography has proved a particularly stimulating place of investigation. David Amigoni's *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (1993) discusses the role of biography in the nineteenth-century development of history and literature as academic disciplines. Amigoni's 2006 collection, *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, further examines the cultural impact of Victorian biography through a range of topics such as political biographies and obituaries. Joanne Shattock's work on biographies of female writers has challenged assumptions about the narrowness and uniformity of nineteenth-century life-writing on women, whilst the role of biography in Victorian constructions of masculinity has been scrutinized by Trev Broughton. A number of works have considered how social groups, such as painters (Julie Codell) or the Clapham Sect (Tolley), used biography to consolidate their power in the public sphere. These studies share the assumption that Victorian biography participated in important ways in the negotiation of cultural tensions. They insist that the significant place accorded to biography in the nineteenth-century literary market makes these

¹⁰ Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (London, 1984); William H. Epstein, *Recognizing Biography* (Philadelphia, 1987); William H. Epstein (ed.), *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism* (Indiana, 1991).

works a profitable though overlooked place of inquiry in Victorian studies. This study of Victorian biographies of ‘obscure’ lives grew out of these discussions.¹¹

Biography in the nineteenth century was particularly alert to the ‘spirit of the age’. Each chapter considers how the biographical genre was adapted and remoulded to welcome subjects for which it did not immediately seem suited. Inextricably tied with this is a reflection on how the genre absorbed but also remoulded the representation of particular social groups and how this representation responded to contemporary debates in other genres. Chapter One provides an overview of Victorian biography and contextualises these debates. Since biographies of ‘obscure’ subjects were to some extent envisaged as a counterpart to lives of famous men, it is important to establish initially what they were written against. Biographers of this ‘sub-genre’ and those who reviewed them shared many preoccupations with their fellow practitioners writing in the Great Tradition of biography, yet when the subject was not famous these concerns were given a very different emphasis. The chapter reveals the extent of the fashion for ‘obscure’ lives, and argues that it evolved from recent and contemporary developments in biography, but also poetry, fiction and historiography.

The second and third chapters consider the relationship between biography and marginality. Biography is usually seen as a very public genre that consolidates public reputations. Yet the relationship between the biographer, the subject and the reader are recast when the subject is deliberately removed from the shadows. As Alison Booth argues in *Greatness Engendered*, George Eliot and, later, Virginia Woolf stressed the value of ‘obscure

¹¹ David Amigoni, *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (London, 1993); David Amigoni (ed.), *Life Writing and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot, 2006); Joanne Shattock (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900* (Cambridge, 2001); Joanne Shattock, ‘Victorian Women as Writers and Readers of (Auto)biography’, in *Mortal Pages, Literary Lives*, ed. Vincent Newey and Phillip Shaw (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 140-52; Trev Lynn Broughton, *Men of Letters, Writing Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography in the Late Victorian Period* (London, 1999); Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian Artist: Artists’ Lifewritings in Britain, ca. 1870-1910* (Cambridge, 2003).

lives' and both sought to elaborate narratives 'that comprehended the subordinated individuals – workers, the poor, and women generally'.¹² Both categories beg the question of whether biographers who paid them unprecedented attention were acting in the interests of social equality or of social harmony. Biographies of 'obscure' women seem in many ways entirely *sui generis*, since the opposition between famous and unknown women did not function in the same manner as the contrast between famous and unknown men. By wavering between a constricting and liberating interpretation of obscurity, however, biographers of women did frequently echo biographers of 'obscure' men.

Chapters four and five approach another function commonly ascribe to biography, namely the power to canonise. The fortunes of artists in particular can often be measured according to the frequency of their commemoration in biographies and collective biographies. The fourth chapter takes a closer look at biographies of neglected writers (most of them poets) who were championed by their biographers. Victorian biographers were led to grapple with the Romantic legacy of the poet neglected in his own time only to be celebrated in posterity. As such, they envisaged biography as a genre that can heal rifts between the individual and the community. The biographers repeatedly couched their attempts to rescue reputations within a broader discourse on the health of the nation. The identity and state of the nation becomes of primordial importance in the greatest Victorian biographical enterprise: the *Dictionary of National Biography*, to which is devoted the fifth chapter. The chapter argues that the *DNB*, and its editor Leslie Stephen in particular, pulled together the many threads of nineteenth-century biographies of 'obscure' lives and developed a theory of obscurity in which it is not the rescuing of the subject which is of most importance but the moral regeneration that such an endeavour could bring to the reader and, by implication, the nation.

¹² Alison Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (London, 1992), p. 93.

A concluding chapter returns to Virginia Woolf in order to challenge her assumptions on Victorian biography, but also to suggest the similarities between Woolf's approach to biography and that of Leslie Stephen, who provides a bridge between two seemingly distinct periods in the history of biography. Woolf picked up many ideas on 'obscure lives' that were already circulating several decades earlier. Her greatest innovation did not lie in calling for more attention to be paid to the 'obscure', but in ascribing a more militant and feminist role to biographers who resurrected hidden lives.

Choosing an 'obscure' subject inflated the importance of the biographer. A biographer, whoever his subject, acts as a mediator between his subject and the reader. However, whereas a biography of a great man implies an act of homage, the biography of an 'obscure' man suggests an act of patronage. Many biographers used this platform to address the nation as a whole and remind them of their duty towards artists, towards the poor, or the neglected. The fact that so many biographers justified their enterprise by drawing upon acknowledged contemporary 'prophets' suggests that they conceived of their role in a similar light. These biographies provide yet another response to a central Victorian reflection: how can individual fulfilment be reconciled with social prosperity? The works constantly move between an individual and a national perspective. Twentieth-century attempts to uncover hidden lives have also been in many ways concerned with the identity of the nation responsible for ignoring them. Crucially, and surprisingly, whereas these recent works claim remembrance for the overlooked, long-term remembrance is not the principal preoccupation for the Victorian biographers. The works are above all preoccupied with stimulating a feeling of empathy and generosity towards the 'obscure' in a manner that recognises and stimulates the health and wealth of the nation.

The study addresses an important trend of Victorian biography that has never been given sustained attention, and seeks to participate in the growing discussions of a previously neglected genre. The accompanying descriptive catalogue provides descriptions for a number of little-known works that could, in many cases, benefit from further study and support investigations of biography but also of the representation of various social groups. Biographies were not produced in isolation from other genres but interacted with contemporary debates in fiction and non-fiction to a degree that has often been underestimated. The study of the genre is therefore also a study of the influence of Thomas Carlyle and, to a lesser extent, George Eliot, in nineteenth-century culture. Furthermore, the thesis advances that it is productive to consider the relationship between nineteenth- and twentieth-century biography in terms of dialogue rather than of rupture. The Victorians laid the foundations for a type of biographical writing that Woolf picked up and remoulded, and that continues to gain in popularity today.

Chapter One

Victorian Biography and the Rise of the 'Obscure' Subject

The comparative paucity of studies on Victorian biography means that it is necessary to provide a rapid overview of the genre during this period in order to identify the position that biographies of 'obscure' subjects held within it. Biography reached unprecedented heights of popularity during Queen Victoria's reign, to the extent that some commentators perceived it as a serious rival to the novel. It is worth pausing on the most notorious and successful works, since these lives of famous men, and a handful of famous women, constituted the tradition that biographers of the 'obscure' worked with but also against. Discussions of biography during the nineteenth century concentrated principally on three issues: the generic status of biography, its didactic potential and, paradoxically, its ethical transgressions. All three have been discussed in other studies. Since many of these issues depended on the public status of the subjects, it is useful here to stress those aspects of the debate that were relevant to the representation of hidden lives, and to consider how this sub-genre of biography contested or evaded these concerns. This, together with recent and contemporary developments in biography but also poetry, fiction and historiography, provided the context in which biographies of 'obscure' lives could flourish with a profusion that took many critics aback.

Victorian Biography: An Overview

Twentieth-century critics have frequently labelled the Victorian period as the age of the novel. Yet for many men and women of letters surveying the literary scene, the nineteenth century was almost as strikingly the Age of Biography. Most critics agreed that biography was one of the most ancient forms of literature. Margaret Oliphant described it as 'one of the oldest in the world – if not the first, at least a very early form of literary composition'.¹³ George Smith, ten years after he launched the *Dictionary of National Biography*, concurred that from 'the Book of Exodus down to the Biographical Dictionary, literature has been mainly preoccupied with biography'.¹⁴ Yet for many the genre had developed an unprecedented importance, such that Robert Goodbrand felt able to declare in 1870 that 'until within the last hundred years there has been no idea of biography at all. It is a modern attainment'.¹⁵ 'Biography is a branch of literary art to which the present generation devotes itself', was the remark of one critic in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1879.¹⁶ A writer in the *Quarterly Review* noted in 1884 that 'though for the last half-century pure fiction has been in the ascendant, the popularity of biography, if not relatively yet absolutely, seems to be continually increasing'.¹⁷ Five years later, a survey of 'The Literature and Language of the Age' in the *Edinburgh Review* led to the judgment that Biography 'is at this moment the most popular form of literature'. Indeed, the anonymous writer pursues, 'it is a curious characteristic of the literature of the day that biography preponderates to an enormous extent over every other branch of composition.'¹⁸

It is difficult to verify such statements. Of all literary genres, the boundaries of biography are perhaps the hardest to define. If one includes within the category the countless

¹³ Margaret Oliphant, 'The Ethics of Biography', *CR*, 44 (July-December 1883), p. 76.

¹⁴ [George Smith], 'On Biography and Biographies', *TB*, 94 (April 1892), p. 579.

¹⁵ Robert Goodbrand, 'A Suggestion for a New Kind of Biography', *CR*, 14 (April 1870), p. 20.

¹⁶ [Unsigned], 'Studies in Biography', *FM*, 20 (August 1879), p. 255.

¹⁷ [R. C. Christie], 'Biographical Dictionaries', *QR*, 157 (January 1884), p. 187.

¹⁸ [Unsigned], 'The Literature and Language of the Age', *ER*, 169 (April 1889), p. 329.

pamphlets, religious tracts loosely based on individual lives, religious biographies and saints' lives, memorial sketches of philanthropists, tradesmen, or local worthies, and commemorations of cherished fathers, mothers, siblings and friends written and printed uniquely for private circulation, the number of biographies circulating in the Victorian age is astounding. Gathering precise statistics of the genre is beset by further difficulties. Biographical titles often resemble the titles of novels. In the common case of anonymous works, a consultation of the title is often insufficient, as the line between a heavily fictionalised life based on fact, and a fictional narrative made to resemble a biography, in the case of the more amateurish works, is hard to draw. A further ambiguity regarding the extent of the involvement of a biographer poses more problems. Some biographers clearly stated their authorship on the title page. Others, often though not always prompted by modesty, presented themselves as editors of a subject's diaries, personal musings, and letters. The nature of the narrative written to connect these autobiographical writings varies from one biography to another, and many biographers who labelled themselves editors went far beyond the duties of selection, arrangement and annotation. A definitive catalogue of Victorian biography is impossible.

Nevertheless, some guidance on the significance of the genre during the years of Queen Victoria's reign can be gained from library records and the *Publishers' Circular*, though they too often seemed baffled by the task facing them. Biography is at times given its own category, at others listed alongside history, and at others grouped with geography, travel, and history. In the first half of the nineteenth century, according to the *Bibliotheca Londinensis*, this latter category accounted for approximately 17.3% publications, behind religious books, which were a fifth of all books published, and slightly ahead of fiction and

juvenile works.¹⁹ By 1900, novels easily overtook biographies. The *Publishers' Circular* lists 2,109 books works of fiction and juvenile literature²⁰ against 716 historical and biographical publications, whilst theology's share of the market was rapidly dropping, with 708 works. Whatever the impressions of critics, biography's ascendance over fiction receded throughout the century, though the rate of publication remained high. [Fig. 1]

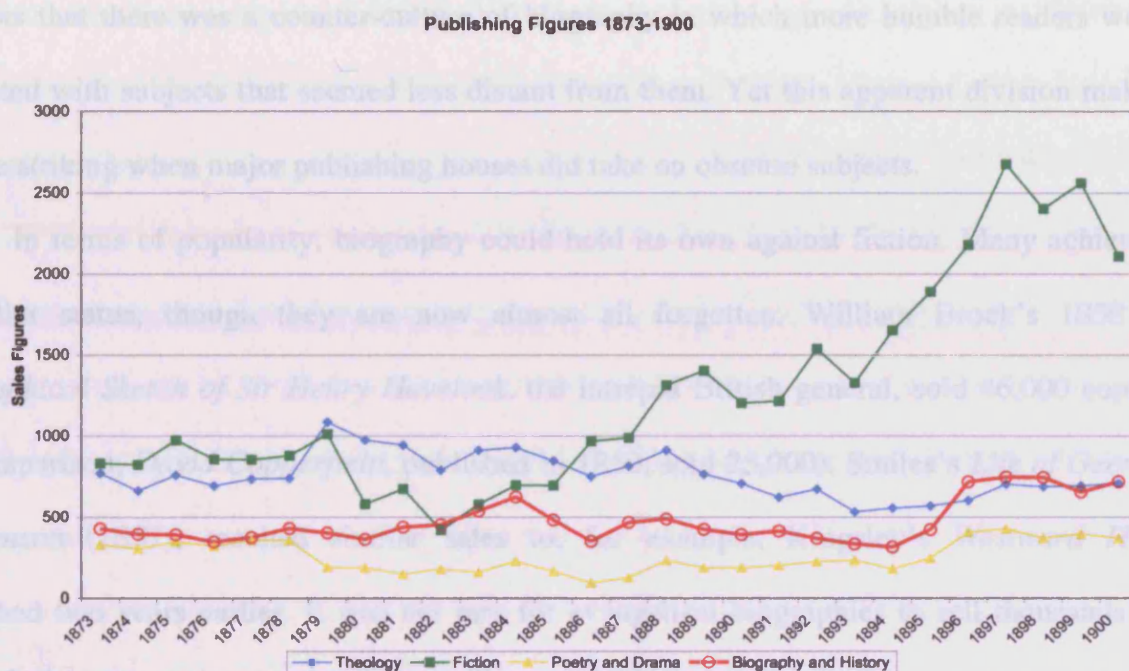


Fig. 1. Publishing statistics gathered from the *Publishers' Circular*

Publishing firms tended to specialise in certain areas of biography. Unsurprisingly, major companies such as John Murray, Longmans, Routledge or Richard Bentley published the 'great lives': political, historical and literary biographies of renowned individuals. Though highbrow in their ambitions, they also attracted the popular biographers read by all classes of society, such as Samuel Smiles. Publishers such as Simpkin Marshall's developed a sound reputation for the publication of religious biographies. Other firms shied from the obvious subjects, and focused instead on commemorating the lives of less renowned individuals, and

¹⁹ *Bibliotheca Londinensis* (London, 1848).

²⁰ 'English Literature in 1900', *JSSL*, 64 (March 1901), pp. 138-40.

predominantly contemporary rather than historical subjects. Many authors of domestic biographies sent them their memorials. James Nisbet and Hamilton, Adams & Co., were particularly significant publishers of such works, with the latter celebrating Scottish subjects in particular. These were usually cheap productions, short and clumsily written. At first glance, it appears that humble, inglorious lives were directed at less educated readers, which suggests that there was a counter-culture of biography in which more humble readers were presented with subjects that seemed less distant from them. Yet this apparent division makes it more striking when major publishing houses did take on obscure subjects.

In terms of popularity, biography could hold its own against fiction. Many achieved bestseller status, though they are now almost all forgotten. William Brock's 1858 *A Biographical Sketch of Sir Henry Havelock*, the intrepid British general, sold 46,000 copies (in comparison, *David Copperfield*, published in 1850, sold 25,000). Smiles's *Life of George Stephenson* (1857), reached similar sales to, for example, Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, published two years earlier. It was not rare for evangelical biographies to sell thousands of copies.²¹ For all the scandals that frequently surrounded biographies, the genre was essentially respectable and one in which many of the key figures of the age were widely read. Charlotte Brontë recommended to a friend that she read 'Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Southey's *Life of Nelson*, Lockhart's *Life of Burns*, Moore's *Life of Sheridan*, Moore's *Life of Byron*, Wolfe's *Remains*'.²² Dickens was annoyed by an enthusiastic biography of William Blake. George Eliot cried over Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*; G. H. Lewes wept over Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Suddenly, biography seemed everywhere and almost impossible to ignore.

²¹ See Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Columbus, 1998).

²² Charlotte Brontë, in Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1857), vol. I, p. 140.

*

Critics recognized the significance of biography in the literary market. This made the failings of the genre even more dismaying. Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey and many of the other early twentieth-century biographers lambasted their Victorian forebears for the shoddy composition of ‘those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead’.²³ It is less frequently noted that the Victorians were often equally quick in condemning the many weaknesses of the works that loaded their shelves. In 1832, Thomas Carlyle found it ‘lamentable, that so few genuinely-good *Biographies* have yet been accumulated in Literature’.²⁴ He was not the only one. A writer in *Blackwood’s* deplored the ‘useless repetition and provoking redundancy’ of so many works.²⁵ Such harsh criticisms were somewhat mitigated by a general agreement that of all the literary genres none was ‘so difficult to do well’.²⁶ Yet, for an age that produced biographies in unprecedented numbers, it was disconcerting for many writers to agree that no biography published in the nineteenth century could rival Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (1791). (Southey’s *Life of Nelson* (1813), which followed a very different model, was the pre-1830 biography that came the closest to undisputed success.) Throughout the nineteenth century, biographers faced the awkward position of writing in a genre whose popularity and generally agreed social importance were as marked as its widespread denunciation. Though many of the criticisms were justified, numerous biographies stand out as sophisticated or innovative works.

Victorian biography responded to changing preoccupations of the times, and three broad movements in the genre can be identified. Unsurprisingly, biographers of the 1830s and 1840s turned their attention to the Romantic men of letters who had recently passed away. Biography had not yet settled down into the much-caricatured two-volume life and letters

²³ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. viii.

²⁴ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Biography’, *FM*, 5 (April 1832), p. 260.

²⁵ [Unsigned], ‘Contemporary Literature’, *BEM* (April 1879), p. 482.

²⁶ George Saintsbury, ‘Some Great Biographies’, *MM*, 66 (June 1892), p. 97.

formula. These tended to be hybrid works, part-biography, part-autobiography, part-memoir, and much resembled the type of impressionistic sketches that Hazlitt was renowned for. De Quincey wrote his *Recollections of the Lake Poets* at this time, though they were published later; Marguerite Blessington recorded conversations with Lord Byron (1832). (Similar works continued to appear much later, such as Hogg's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* and Trelawny's *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*, both published in 1858.) Two works drew particular attention, and became references for later nineteenth-century biographers. Thomas Moore's 1830 *Life and Letters of Lord Byron* was a literary event. Rumours had never ceased to circulate around the author of *Don Juan*, and were exacerbated when John Cam Hobhouse (later Lord Broughton) famously destroyed the poet's memoirs. Moore, Byron's friend and literary executor, and a noted poet in his own right, had read the memoirs and did not deem them particularly shocking and protested over, though he did not prevent, the incineration of the papers. Indeed, those who picked up Moore's *Life* for shocking revelations were disappointed, as letters included are censored and the work is strongly defensive. The work was important for the manner in which it both attracted and shook off scandal. It was also undoubtedly vivid and eloquent - Thomas Macaulay described it as 'among the best specimens of English prose which our age has produced'²⁷ - and demonstrated that critics of biography need not despair entirely.

John Gibson Lockhart's *Life of Scott* was a very different work. Published in seven volumes between 1837 and 1838, with a ten-volume edition published the following year, the biography combined a monumental form with a lively tone that relied heavily on slight fictionalisations, altered or reorganised facts and a Boswellian appreciation of its subject. In reviewing 'Some Great Biographies', George Saintsbury labelled Lockhart 'the prince of all biographers, past, present and to come'. Strict accuracy with regards to sources had not

²⁷ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Moore's Life of Byron', *Critical and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London, 1874), p. 141.

gained the importance that it would some decades later, and critics agreed with Saintsbury that the power of the biography lay in 'the unmatched combination of excellence in the selection and editing with excellence in the connecting narrative'.²⁸ Carlyle more timidly lauded the 'workmanlike' quality of the effort, with a regret that Lockhart did not appear to have a 'very elevated' concept of what that work was.²⁹ Nevertheless, if Moore's work was celebrated as an example of the memoir type of biography, Lockhart's achievement was generally praised for embodying a perfect balance between the biographer's and the subject's voice.

Both of these works influenced discussions of nineteenth-century biography, though they were in many ways examples of Romantic biography in content – as the works of Romantic poets and critics reflecting on the legacy of a dying age – and in style, with their Boswellian aspects. It was perhaps Arthur Stanley's *Life of Arnold* (1844) that represented a turning point. Stanley invented little but used a eulogising tone and lengthy death-scene in a manner that resonated with a new generation of readers. As A. O. J. Cockshut argues in *Truth to Life* (1974), Stanley's most influential act was to create a new kind of hero.³⁰ Arnold is not the statesman of classical biography, the popular actor or writer of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century biography, nor the humble hero of evangelical tracts. The commemoration of a schoolmaster (however illustrious) opened the door to thousands of memoirs of middle and upper-middle class heroes, whose force lay in their moral authority.

Mid-century Victorian biography has faced the harshest criticisms. Harold Nicolson's opinion that it is not 'necessary to trace in any detail the developments of English biography

²⁸ Saintsbury, 'Some Great Biographies', pp. 99-102.

²⁹ Thomas Carlyle, 'Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott', *LWR*, 28 (January 1838), p. 296.

³⁰ Cockshut, *Truth to Life*, pp. 89-91.

between 1838 and 1882, between the date of Lockhart's *Scott* and that of Froude's *Carlyle*,³¹ is common. In fact, those years were amongst the most creative and influential in the history of biography. During these years, Thomas Carlyle put into practice his theory of biography in the striking *Life of John Sterling* (1851) and Elizabeth Gaskell wrote the first significant biography of a woman by another woman with her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). Both demonstrated that biography could aspire to the highest standards of literary art. This was also a time when new types of biography were being produced.

Biographies celebrating new kinds of heroes began to multiply. As the 1851 Great Exhibition demonstrated British industrial, imperial and economic supremacy, so did representatives of these successes crowd library shelves. Military and imperial power conjoined in the lives of 'Christian soldiers'. Sir Henry Havelock, a general who fought during the 1857 Indian Mutiny, recaptured Cawnpore and died after the end of the siege of Lucknow, was the subject of several biographies. An 1858 sketch by William Brock, and a full-length biography by the erudite Oriental scholar John Clark Marshman, published in 1860, were bestsellers and went into several editions. These lives were exemplary, and stressed the domestic as well as the professional valour of their subjects. *The Times* rejoiced that 'the middle classes of this country may well be proud of such men as these, born and bred in their ranks [...], proud of men who were noble without high birth'.³² Popular editions were printed to further disseminate these ideals. It was the content rather than the style of these works that stood out, though Marshman's biography is a sophisticated work that remains highly readable. Such biographies (and there were many of similar subjects) formed, as Graham Dawson demonstrates, 'a new tradition of exemplary imperial masculinity which

³¹ Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography*, p. 125.

³² [Unsigned], *The Times*, 22838 (November 14, 1857), p. 6.

remained at the heart of the British national imaginary right up to 1914.³³ Missionary biographies, and in particular the life of David Livingstone, mirrored these in many ways.³⁴ Industrial biography provided a domestic counterpart to these imperial heroes. Samuel Smiles's *Life of George Stephenson* (1857) sold thousands of copies, and was enjoyed by a wide range of readers from schoolchildren through businessmen to George Eliot. Again, in Smiles's work, professional success and private virtue went hand in hand, and the definition of a 'hero' was further extended.

Samuel Smiles was also responsible for the enormous expansion, if not the creation, of self-help biography. G. L. Craik's *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (1831-2) was an early example of a collection of sketches of individuals who demonstrated the value of perseverance, hard work, and moral virtue. Craik's work was highly influential at a time when working men's institutes were burgeoning. Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859), however, appeared at a time of national self-confidence that made it appear as a perfect representative of what could be achieved through individual strength. Again, the work was immensely popular and had sold a quarter of a million copies by the time of Smiles's death in 1904. Smiles's models were taken from all classes of society, from humble shoemakers to national leaders, and reached beyond British borders. The author did not advocate class transgression (though he had raised himself from the status of a doctor's apprentice), and rejected accusations that the ideals he advocated were mercenary ones. Countless works of collective biographies were published on the Smiles model until the end of the century, and a new type of popular biography was born.³⁵

³³ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p. 83.

³⁴ See Clare Pettitt, *Dr Livingstone, I Presume? Missionaries, Journalists, Explorers and Empire* (London, 2007).

³⁵ See Chapter 3.

The mid-century also witnessed the beginning of academic and professional biography. A number of biographers turned their attention to important historical, literary or philosophical figures, conscientiously collected sources, widened their research to the period during which the subject lived in order to question the influence of contemporary mores on an individual life and sought to provide scholarly accounts of major figures. Thomas Carlyle, who had tested his historical method with a life of Cromwell (1845), launched into his epic biography of Frederick the Great. David Masson began his six-tomed life of Milton, ‘in connection with the history of his own time’, published between 1859 and 1880. The work is stilted and dry, though admirable in its scholarly attempt. James Spedding attempted to combine scholarship and readability in *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon* (1861-72), though again the work lacks energy. (Pattison’s life of Casaubon, published in 1875, achieved the balance better.) Though it is easy to quarrel with many of the aspects of the biographies published during these years, they laid the ground for many significant later works. Too rapidly condemned as unwieldy and pious, mid-Victorian biography in fact revised the boundaries of the genre and originated the types of biography that remain current today.

As the century drew to its close, biography both confirmed the mood of national confidence and submitted it to sceptical scrutiny. Major figures of the Victorian age began to pass away, and with their decease came an opportunity for their commemorators to assess the age they had embodied. The last three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed important biographies of major Victorians, a trend initiated perhaps by John Forster’s *Life of Dickens* (1872-4), introduced as the life of ‘the most popular novelist of the century’.³⁶ Dickens had made a large bonfire of private papers before his death, and, though his future biographer knew of the most intimate secrets of his life (including the existence of his mistress Ellen

³⁶ John Forster, *The Life of Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872), vol. I, p. 1.

Ternan), Forster produced a work that was both engaging and discreet. Forster was much ridiculed for exaggerating his own importance in Dickens's life; another reproach was that little insight is given into Dickens's inner life, beyond the previously unpublished autobiographical sketch of his childhood that Forster included. Nevertheless, the work is a polished biography by an experienced biographer, and the fame of its subject was sufficient to allow it sell in thousands of copies. Trelawny's biography of his uncle, the eminent historian Macaulay (1876), is a more accomplished portrait of a major Victorian. Though critics might complain of the over-delicacy of certain biographers, it is highly questionable whether warts-and-all portraits of such popular figures would have met with a graceful reception.

This was put to the test with James Anthony Froude's four-volume biography of Thomas Carlyle, published as *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life* (1882) and *Thomas Carlyle: a History of his Life in London, 1834-1881* (1884), which originated the biggest biographical scandal of the century. Froude was a faithful disciple of the nineteenth-century prophet who had already braved controversy after he published the novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1848), widely condemned as heretical. It was Carlyle himself who presented a shocked Froude with reminiscences of his wife that he had written after her death in which he lamented his harsh treatment of her, and who consulted him as to their eventual publication. Carlyle later wavered in his assent that Froude write his biography, though an agreement was finally given.

The outrage expressed upon Froude's publication of the *Reminiscences* a month after Carlyle's death in 1881 only intensified once the full-length biography began to appear the following year. Where Froude had sought to convey pathos and tragedy, the public saw betrayal and indecency. A suggestion that Carlyle may have been impotent, which Froude asserted Carlyle had claimed to him, broke new boundaries in Victorian standards of privacy.

Readers ignored the sheer power of the work and depicted Froude as a traitor.³⁷ It is important, however, to temper this depiction of an outraged Victorian public. One response to the Froude scandal was a renewal of biographical censorship. Cross's memoir of his wife George Eliot (1885), written in the wake of the scandal, was as dry, pious and decent as anyone could wish. So much so, in fact, that Gladstone quipped that 'it is not a Life at all – it is a Reticence, in three volumes'.³⁸ The reception of Hallam Tennyson's 1897 biography of his father was equally tepid. The scandal surrounding Froude's life of Carlyle was unprecedented, but the maligned biographer had his supporters as well as his attackers. The age may not have been prepared for an all-too-human portrait, but neither was it content with excessive piety. [Fig. 2]

PUNCH'S FANCY PORTRAITS.—No. 116.



J. A. FROUDE.

Carlyle's Speaking Likeness (grimly)—
**"AFTER MY DEATH I WISH NO OTHER HERALD,
 NO OTHER SPEAKER OF MY LIVING ACTIONS,
 TO KEEP MINE HONOUR FROM CORRUPTION,
 BUT SUCH AN HONEST CHRONICLER AS—FROUDE."**

Fig. 2. Edward Linley Sambourne,
Punch
 (December 30, 1882), p. 303

³⁷ See Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (London, 1992).

³⁸ Quoted in E. F. Benson, *As We Were* (London, 1930), p. 111.

The scholarly biographies that multiplied at the close of the century stayed clear of such controversies and attempted to offer balanced and concise portraits of significant subjects. Biography was increasingly used as a canonising tool that could assess the accomplishments of an age through the depiction of its most significant individuals. The English Men of Letters, the Twelve English Statesmen, or the Eminent Women series (there were many more of a similar nature, though these stand out as the most accomplished) sought to provide such evaluations in single-subject volumes. Collective biographies expressed similar aims, with works such as *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign* (1897) and *Men and Women of the Time* (1899). (As more women participated in the kind of activities that were deemed of sufficient significance for biographical commemoration, such as nursing, missionary work or work in education, they appeared more frequently.) This reached its apogee with Leslie Stephen's and Sidney Lee's monumental *Dictionary of National Biography* (1882-1901). The *Dictionary* reflected the gradual broadening of biographical subjects that had occurred throughout the period. Though in many ways it stands as the final monument of Victorian life-writing before the 'new biographers' arrived with their iconoclastic ambitions, a strong case can be made for the *DNB* as a bridge between two different periods in the history of biography.

It is almost impossible to draw conclusions from such a diverse history. A number of generalisations, however, form a useful background to the discussion of the parallel tradition of biography that thrived during the Victorian period. Firstly, in the vast majority of cases (and excluding, of course, historical biography) the biographer was a writer who had had personal contact with his subject. Indeed, most nineteenth-century biographers followed the Johnsonian (and Boswellian) precept that personal knowledge between the biographer and subject formed the precondition for a successful biography. (It was also this, rather than excessive piety, that made it so difficult for biographers to dare depict their friends or family

members in a potentially unflattering light.) Secondly, it was generally accepted that the biographer was a man of lesser talent who wrote the life of a more famous and greater man. John Forster, for example, was notorious as a man of letters, but was in no manner comparable to Dickens, and even Elizabeth Gaskell did not reach the fame (nor, it can be argued, the genius) of Charlotte Brontë. Finally, biography, like history and unlike fiction, depended on available material. It is often claimed, with justification, that the subjects chosen by biographers reflect the nature and preoccupations of the age. That lives of soldiers, statesmen or writers were published in their hundreds and sold in their thousands rather than commemorations of housewives does offer a commentary on occupations that were deemed of public interest. Yet it is also the case that famous subjects choose their biography more than their biography chooses them. Biographies of Dickens, Carlyle and George Eliot appeared at the time that they did simply because that was when these subjects died, and their fame made it an almost natural consequence. Such comments suggest the obvious. Yet, with biographies of obscure subjects, they no longer hold true.

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Despite the diversity of nineteenth-century biography, many of the contemporary articles that appeared concerning the genre displayed a preoccupation with at least one of three issues: its claims to being an art or a craft, the didactic potential of biography, and the ethical questions raised by a genre that brought private matters to public light. That these issues had drawn attention from the inception of biography did not lessen the vigour with which they were addressed. As they fed into the reception of both works that represented the dominant mode of Victorian biography and those that seemed to challenge them, they are worth briefly considering.

Nineteenth-century biography was caught in the midst of a process of self-definition. At the beginning of the century, the consensus was that biography formed a sub-category of

history. By the end of the century, there were more critics prepared to argue for it as a literary genre. Yet the demarcation between history and literature was far more complex than a matter of fact versus fiction. For the Victorians, biography and history were closely entangled: Carlyle's statement that history is the 'essence of innumerable biographies' became a commonplace.³⁹ Nevertheless, identifying biography as a form of history was all the more difficult as history itself seemed an unstable category. Biography had been identified as a form of history since antiquity. In the mid-eighteenth century, Roger North tentatively suggested that the 'same ingredients that are usually brought to adorn fiction may come forward' in historical and biographical writing, such as a careful 'choice of words, charming periods, inventions of figures, interspersions of sentences, and facetious expressions'.⁴⁰ Such ideas were taken up and extended by the Romantics. As L. Kochan argues in *The Romantic Movement*, Romantic historians argued for the primacy of 'imagination and constructiveness before analysis and criticism'.⁴¹ Their influence endured. Reviewers of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837) or Macaulay's *History of England* (1849-55) noted with varying degrees of gratification the similarities of the works to fiction, drama, or poetry. The debate had evolved so far in 1831 that William Wordsworth wrote in the context of a commentary on Currie's *Life of Burns* (1800) that 'biography, though differing in some essentials from works of fiction, is nevertheless, like them, an *art*'.⁴² Long before Virginia Woolf wondered whether biography was an art or a craft, the question was being asked.

Biographers themselves were uncertain. The labels 'edited by' and 'by' were often used interchangeably on title pages. Many contented themselves with assembling scraps of

³⁹ Carlyle, 'Biography', p. 253.

⁴⁰ Roger North, 'General Preface' to *Life of the Lord Keeper North*, unpublished; quoted in James L. Clifford (ed.), *Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960* (London, 1962), pp. 27-37.

⁴¹ L. Kochan, 'The Internal Vision: Sympathy', in *The Romantic Movement*, ed. Anthony Thorlby (London, 1966), p. 90.

⁴² William Wordsworth, *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Volume III* (Oxford, 1974), p. 121.

letters and diaries with the justification that they were editing a posthumous autobiography. Countless bulky volumes were presented to the public with the assurance that there the subject was 'speaking for himself'. An enduring trend within the nineteenth century was to minimise the presence of the biographer within the work as far as possible, as if his cultural legitimacy was not yet ascertained. As a correlative, it was often assumed early in the century that if a biography was good it was simply because the subject was an interesting one. The changes in Boswell's fortunes throughout the period are perhaps the best indicator of the evolving reputation of the biographer. For Macaulay and Carlyle, as for many others, the *Life of Johnson* was a 'very great work' despite Boswell being 'one of the smallest men that ever lived'.⁴³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the judgement was reversed: it was agreed that Boswell possessed 'no ordinary literary skill' and the 'supremacy of Boswell's art' was accepted.⁴⁴ Such comments arrived at a time when critics were less forgiving with biographers who forwent the tasks of selection, compression and skilful narration. The biographer was no longer expected to hide in the shadows.

Indeed, as the century progressed, biography was encouraged to forge its own identity, distinct from either fiction or history. One reason for this was that historians such as William Stubbs sought to champion history as an academic discipline and promoted a more professional attitude to historical research. This process involved distinguishing historical writing from the more popular and sometimes less reputable genre of biography. Biography could assist academic disciplines by providing concise guides to key writers and thinkers (as with the English Men of Letters series), but it was increasingly understood that biography had a different role to play within the literary market. The notion of biography's distinct identity had so far progressed by 1892 that the respected critic George Saintsbury published an article

⁴³ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Croker's Edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson', *Critical and Historical Essays*, p.170.

⁴⁴ Saintsbury, 'Some Great Biographies', pp. 98-9.

analysing 'Some Great Biographies', which was an important step in establishing a canon of key biographical achievements. This evolution also meant that biographers could assert their cultural importance.

Debates surrounding biography's didactic potential were as ancient as those concerning its generic definition. From Plutarch's *Lives* (c. 50-125 AD) to Samuel Johnson, the ability of biography to teach by example was constantly reaffirmed. The Victorians celebrated this aspect of the genre perhaps above any other. The majority of biographies published during the period are exemplary. The title of G. J. Holyoake's essay *The Value of Biography in the Formation of Individual Character* (1845) gives some idea of the confidence felt in the genre. The appearance of certain topics in contemporary popular fiction can be a useful indicator of cultural trends. Victorian novels are full of characters learning from biography. The heroine of Mary Shelley's *Falkner* (1837) 'read biography, and speedily found models for herself, whereby she measured her own thoughts and conducts, rectifying her defects, and aiming at that honour and generosity which made her heart beat and cheeks glow, when narrated of others.'⁴⁵ In Bulwer Lytton's *The Caxtons* (1849), the hero's father urges him to 'diet yourself well on biography, the biography of good and great men', and thrusts a copy of the *Life of the Reverend Robert Hall* into his hands.⁴⁶ The didactic content could be religious, with exhortations to lead a pious life, or secular, as in Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859). The potential power wielded by such works was such that biographies aimed at working-class readers were very cautious in the ideals they promoted, and made a careful distinction between self-improvement and social improvement.⁴⁷ Whatever the

⁴⁵ Mary Shelley, *Falkner: a novel* (London, 1996), p. 39.

⁴⁶ Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* (London, 1874), p. 233.

⁴⁷ See chapter 3.

differences between these works, exemplary biography was pervasive, and the belief in the emulative power of biography was rarely questioned.

Not only the content but the form itself of biography held a didactic role. Biographers and critics frequently argued that, though the genre borrowed techniques from fiction, biography could subdue dangerous female imaginative flights. At a time when fiction was being produced in ever-greater numbers with ever-more thrilling tales of romance or mystery, biography was lauded as a safer alternative. The editor of *Women of Worth* (1859) takes this line in its preface, which insists that woman ‘should be a student of the real’.⁴⁸ Indeed, it was deemed that women of letters were best suited to write biography as well as read it, since ‘the general bent of the female mind [...] is to be influenced in its opinions, and swayed in its conduct, by individual man, rather than general ideas’.⁴⁹ Naturally, the respectable façade of biography meant that, as with religious tracts, the wildest tales could be told under a cover of facts. Many of these works, such as Emma Pitman’s *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880), provide ample excitement. In Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash* (1863), the pious Jane Hardie laments the ‘rage’ for ‘fiction under a thin disguise of religious biography’.⁵⁰ Mrs. Linnet, in George Eliot’s ‘Janet’s Repentance’, skips the more didactic passages of her religious books, and, ‘on taking up the biography of a celebrated preacher, she immediately turned to the end to see what disease he died of’.⁵¹ It is hard to believe that her conduct was unusual.

On the whole, however, readers and critics expected biographers to provide some form of guidance. However sparse the biographer’s commentary within a work, readers clung to the device of a final chapter, or couple of paragraphs, in which the biographer would summarise the lessons of the life just depicted and offer a verdict on the subject. Allan Cunningham wrote in the *Athenaeum* that Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* was damaged by the

⁴⁸ [Anonymous], *Women of Worth* (London: James Hogg & Son, 1859), p. 10.

⁴⁹ [Unsigned], ‘Biography’, *BEM*, 69 (January 1851), p. 43.

⁵⁰ Charles Reade, *Hard Cash* (London, 1863), vol. II, p. 177.

⁵¹ George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Oxford, 1985), p. 212.

omission of such a final judgment since 'every one forms a mental character according to his abilities or prejudices, and nothing is fixed or defined'.⁵² The reader's analytical competence is distrusted as strongly as the biographer's judgment is valued. Such views expressed the underlying conviction that each life possessed a meaning. In the *Uses of Biography* (1852), the didactic biographer Edwin Paxton Hood reflected that

a ruling passion, or a ruling principle, governs each [life]; it is sometimes thickly overlaid with the biographer's style, and wrapped around with bandaging words; but even through all it may be detected.⁵³

Hood paradoxically depicts biography as organising itself despite the biographer, who is suffered as an unfortunate necessity. Where Cunningham overvalues the biographer's unifying voice, Hood fears its interference. Yet both affirm the existence of a solid meaning even though this solidity is under threat by other interpretative forces. At stake in these discussions was the authority of the biographer. Critics were rarely satisfied with the biographer's stance. In biographies such as Thomas Moore's *Life and Letters of Lord Byron* that let the subject speak for himself, readers eagerly tried to read between the lines. In works where the biographer's interpretation was clearly put forward, as in the Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the biographer was accused of bias. As different accounts of the same life were published, such as the many biographies of Byron, biographies made different claims to the truth. It became apparent that the meaning imposed on a life was not fixed but was instead a matter of opinion and debate.

A solution to this difficulty lay in a rather different didactic role open to biography. Indeed, the capacity of biography to teach could be safeguarded if the genre was reconfigured in a more secular manner. Thomas Carlyle provided perhaps the strongest expression of the ability of biography to stimulate human empathy:

⁵²Allan Cunningham, 'Biographical and Critical History of the Literature of the Last Fifty Years', *The Athenaeum*, 320 (December 14, 1833), p. 851.

⁵³ Edwin Paxton Hood, *On the Uses of Biography: Romantic, Philosophic and Didactic* (London, 1852), p. 92.

How inexpressibly comfortable to know our fellow-creature; to see into him, understand his goings forth, [...] nay, not only to see him, but even to see out of him, to view the world altogether as he views it.⁵⁴

Carlyle brings together the Enlightenment idea that ‘the proper study of mankind is man’ with a more Romantic notion of empathy as expressed, for example, in Hazlitt’s conceptualisation of the imagination as a moral agent.⁵⁵ Biography could, as such, participate in contemporary debates in fictional and philosophical works on how to balance individual desires with communal responsibilities and often echoed the language of religious humanism, though it is perhaps paradoxical that a genre that focuses on individuals should promote the values of altruism and community.

The current tendency to minimise the distance between autobiography and biography has further downplayed the extent to which biography depicted itself as a counter-force to contemporary self-obsession. Carlyle believed in the ideal of a ‘state of healthy unconsciousness’,⁵⁶ and he was not the only Victorian to be deeply suspicious of the autobiographical impulse. (The fact that so many biographies were heavily reliant on autobiographical material went unremarked.) Robert Goodbrand described autobiography as an imperfect stepping-stone ‘before men could learn how to look at their fellow-man with an interest that terminates simply in himself’.⁵⁷ Edwin Paxton Hood went further and argued that autobiography, unlike biography, had an ‘egotistical’ veneer. Indeed, biography offered a treatment for unhealthy self-consciousness and offered the reader and opportunity to purge psychological conflict, as

lives, studied in a right spirit, present to us the varieties of mind-disease, the mode of treatment, the causes of the morbid termination, and the cure.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Carlyle, ‘Biography’, p. 253.

⁵⁵ See William Hazlitt, *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (London, 1998).

⁵⁶ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, in *A Carlyle Reader*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge, 1984), p. 72.

⁵⁷ Goodbrand, ‘A Suggestion for a New Kind of Biography’, pp. 20-1.

⁵⁸ Hood, *On The Uses of Biography*, pp. 118-9.

Biography, for Hood, builds character through a release of morbidity achieved by understanding other human beings. Biography could be used as a civic tool. The events of the French Revolution had demonstrated a further way in which excessive celebration of the individual could threaten social structures. Biography appeared as a safer alternative to autobiography: it celebrated the individual but with communal objectives in mind. Such anxieties lay behind J. B. Brown's declaration, in his 1870 address 'On the Uses of Biography', that studying great lives such as that of William Pitt improves the mind in a manner which contributes 'to make England truly great, more respected abroad, and happier and more united at home'.⁵⁹ The circulation of biography took on the nature of a patriotic duty.

It is a further paradox of biography that a genre that could be considered so morally uplifting could also be condemned as morally despicable. Suspicions regarding the indecency of its methods and motives gathered momentum towards the end of the seventeenth century. Thomas Sprat, himself a biographer, felt that private letters should not be published, as in such documents men undressed their souls, 'and in that negligent habit, they may be fit to be seen by one or two in a chamber, but not to go abroad in the streets'.⁶⁰ Such language endured well into the nineteenth century and, indeed, beyond. During the Victorian period, wariness of biography on ethical grounds increased in the 1850s, years that witnessed a steep rise in biographical publications. By the 1870s, it was far more common to encounter, in essays and journal articles, the defence of a less inhibited form of biography, until the Froude scandal renewed attacks on the unscrupulous biographer.

⁵⁹ J. B. Brown, *On the Uses of Biography* (London, 1871), p. 7.

⁶⁰ Thomas Sprat, 'An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley', in *Abraham Cowley: Poetry & prose. With Thomas Sprat's Life and observations by Dryden, Addison, Johnson and others* (Oxford, 1949), p. xxx.

For many, ethical ambiguity was the price to pay for an artistically powerful biography. Carlyle was not the only writer to mock the ‘Damocles’ sword of *Respectability*’ that hung over the genre.⁶¹ Reviewers were forced to accept that the success of Boswell’s *The Life of Johnson* depended largely on a willingness to reproduce in print private conversations and to depict the subject’s flaws. One anonymous reviewer remarked that

the secret of Boswell’s success in some degree defies and eludes detection; while some of the conditions to which it is most obviously due are such as few men would care to accept. They would object to discarding delicacy and reserve [...].⁶²

The more readable the biography, the more disreputable it often seemed. Indeed, the closer biography came to its avowed aim – that of bringing a man back to life – the closer it provoked an unlawful *frisson* – that of raising the dead. The question then became how to manage the remains.

Legal language was used to discuss the rights of the biographer and his subject long before the nineteenth century. Joseph Addison created an influential portrait of the criminal biographer in a 1716 issue of *The Freeholder*. Addison denounced those ‘*Grub-street* biographers’ who awaited the death of potential subjects ‘to make a Penny of him’ and described their practices as ‘licentious’.⁶³ Echoes of Addison are present in Henry James’s famous portrayal of such a ‘publishing scoundrel’,⁶⁴ and indeed in later works from William Golding’s *The Paper Men* (1984) to A. S. Byatt’s *The Biographer’s Tale* (2001). What changed since Addison was that the biographer was no longer considered a masked outlaw but a public figure who wielded an undeniable power that he was expected to exercise responsibly. To this was added a new legal context regarding the rightful ownership of a life, as copyright laws were defined with increasing care. Margaret Oliphant gave careful

⁶¹ Carlyle, ‘Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott’, p. 299.

⁶² ‘Contemporary Literature’, *BEM* (April 1879), p. 491.

⁶³ Joseph Addison, *The Freeholder* (Oxford, 1979), p. 195.

⁶⁴ Henry James, ‘The Aspern Papers’, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James: Volume 6, 1884-1888* (London, 1963), p. 363.

consideration to 'The Ethics of Biography' in 1883, and compared the biographer to a barrister who 'must violate no law of testimony, and call no unfair witnesses'.⁶⁵ Legal language was used indiscriminately to discuss the genre, as it was uncertain whether the biographer was acting as judge, lawyer, detective, or even criminal – often, indeed, he seemed to be all four.

Yet even these fears concerning the proper use of biographical materials provoked less anxiety than the consequences of the rise of the biographical genre on social intercourse. William Edmonstoune Aytoun's article in *Blackwood's*, 'Modern Biography' (1849), is the most striking example of biography's new-found capacity to breed paranoia. Aytoun was notorious for his humorous essays in *Blackwood's*, and the article displays his traditional brand of comic exaggeration, yet it is representative of the contemporary mood. Aytoun trembled at the thought that an unsuspected biographer could 'be perpetually watching you in the shape of a pretended friend'.⁶⁶ A general climate of suspicion would disrupt natural social intercourse. The expansion of biography meant that suddenly everyone was a potential biographer and a potential subject, which in turn threatened the careful separation of public and private spheres:

The waiter with the bandy-legs, who hand round the negus-tray at a blue-stocking coterie, is in all probability a leading contributor to a fifth-rate periodical.⁶⁷

The biographer can 'read' those around him but is himself unreadable. This was all the more disturbing since, as Richard Sennett describes in *The Fall of Public Man*, the age placed extensive 'faith in immediate appearances as a guide to inner feeling'.⁶⁸ Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4) argued that 'all visible things are emblems'. At a time when clothes

⁶⁵ Oliphant, 'The Ethics of Biography', p. 87.

⁶⁶ W. E. Aytoun, 'Modern Biography', *BEM*, 65 (February 1849), p. 221.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 153.

seemed ‘unspeakably significant’, the consequences of disguise were troubling.⁶⁹ (Aytoun’s vision contains also a dash of class anxiety.) Biography turned every individual’s act into a possible artefact that could be read and interpreted, whilst the biographer betrayed the rules of social legibility by remaining invisible.

The fear of the biographer could create a dangerously artificial society. Charles Allston Collins, in his less humorous article ‘Biography at a discount’, blames ‘indiscriminate biographizing’ for undermining sincerity in social exchanges. Individuals who suspected that they might become the subject of a written commemoration ‘would act accordingly’ with ‘an eye to those terrible two volumes’. Collins picks up Thomas Sprat’s description of the pleasant informality of letter-writing. Whereas ‘we should, in our letters, appear full-dressed when we have to do with strangers or acquaintances, but in dressing-gown and pantoufles to our friends’, biography creates ‘self-consciousness and pains-taking’.⁷⁰ Biography, far from being concerned solely with how lives were written, could modify the way in which lives were lived.

It is worth noting a discordant position. For George Holyoake, biography, on the contrary, served as a tool to strip off social disguises and pretensions. Holyoake argued that

we live in a community of artifice. We can study few persons who are not clothed in appearances, not easily penetrated. But it is different with the dead – *their* characters are formed, the veil is removed, and the picture can be contemplated [...] – the scaffolding is down for the building is reared.⁷¹

Holyoake places little faith in ‘unspeakably significant’ clothes and appearances. Society is a place of illusion and pretence, whereas biography is an act of revelation. The image of the building suggests the safe and public aspects of biography. Holyoake, who was an atheist, welcomes biography as an institution that provides a point of stability in an otherwise unstable world. Greater suspicion of biography is expressed by those critics who held faith in

⁶⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (London, 2000), p. 55.

⁷⁰ Charles Allston Collins, ‘Biography at a Discount’, *MM*, 10 (June 1864), p. 160.

⁷¹ G. Jacob Holyoake, *The Value of Biography in the Formation of Individual Character* (London, 1845), p. 3.

social intercourse; it is for the more sceptical individuals that biography provides a welcome place to study the real nature of man. Biographers themselves displayed a frequent interest in the consequences of the genre as a means of social exchange. This debate was made possible by the widening range of subjects biographers were turning to.

The rise of the 'obscure' subject

The worship of 'Great Men' is commonly evoked as a defining feature of the nineteenth century. Walter Houghton described hero-worship as a 'nineteenth-century phenomenon' celebrated by writers as diverse as Ruskin, Disraeli, Kingsley, Mill, Tennyson, Yonge and, of course, Thomas Carlyle.⁷² Variations on the word 'hero' appeared in the titles of countless biographies and biographical collections, from *The Heroines of History* (1854) to *Cavaliers of Fortune: British Heroes in Foreign Wars* (1859). In his famous lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, given in 1840, Carlyle presented his audience with a wide range of heroes for inspiration, ranging from Scandinavian gods to Napoleon, and encompassing men of letters, religious figures and national leaders. His assertion that 'the History of the World' is 'the Biography of Great Men' was met with widespread (if not unanimous) agreement.⁷³ Victorian readers expected to find instruction in biographies of great men through tales of strong will and surmounted obstacles. The exemplary role of these works is an important aspect of them. It is also worth recalling the more prosaic fact that the lives of men (and some women) who had achieved fame were also read simply because they were famous, much in the same way as modern celebrity biography. Though inspiration could certainly be derived from the best-selling lives of Napoleon, Stephenson or Dickens, so could a fair share of entertainment.

⁷² Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (London, 1985), p. 305.

⁷³ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Oxford, 1993), p. 26.

Victorian hero-worship has been discussed at great length in numerous studies, and it is useful for the purpose of a contrast with biographies of obscure lives to rehearse only some of the ideas that lay behind the phenomenon. One of the roles played by hero-worship was to diminish a sceptical view of human endeavour. As Le Quesne argues in his study of Carlyle, several Victorian intellectuals felt that the 'utilitarian account of morals' that 'deprecated emotion and enthusiasm' circulated by Enlightenment thinkers had been one cause of the French Revolution.⁷⁴ The natural sciences, political and social sciences and the many blows dealt to religious institutions again threatened to reduce human action to a set of impersonal laws. The 'Great Man' theory affirmed faith in the individual. For the religious, hero-worship could be easily integrated with Christianity, as the popularity of religious biography suggests. For those questioning their faith, it provided a stimulating substitute – August Comte's calendar of 538 'saints' that represented pinnacles of human achievement was labelled by Huxley a form of 'Catholicism *minus* Christianity'.⁷⁵ The idea added to the Romantic faith in the individual a concern for social stability. An important aspect of these ideas is that the emphasis was placed more on the feelings that Great Men bred in the worshipper than in the precise nature of the greatness of the worshipped subject.

The idea of hero-worship could be twisted to accommodate a wide range of causes. For Carlyle, it could stimulate wonder in the reader trapped in a base, 'waste-weltering epoch'.⁷⁶ For Charlotte Yonge, heroism alluded to altruistic qualities and, in a mercantile age, the 'spirit of hero-worship' would subdue the dangerous desire for 'promotion, wealth, or success'.⁷⁷ In the hands of the Christian Socialists (endorsed by Charles Kingsley and F. D. Maurice) it was interpreted as a call for the educated classes to assume their responsibilities as leaders of the poor. For many such upper-middle-class men, the notion of, as Girouard

⁷⁴ A. L. Le Quesne, et al., *Victorian Thinkers* (Oxford, 1993), p. 12.

⁷⁵ T. H. Huxley, 'On the Physical Basis of Life', *FR*, 5 (February 1, 1869), p. 141.

⁷⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), p. 51.

⁷⁷ Charlotte Yonge, *A Book of Golden Deeds* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1930), p. 1.

describes, 'gentlemen coming to the rescue of the oppressed' was an attractive one.⁷⁸ It was widely assumed that great men had achieved their status in part by also being good men. What seems like a naïve association between fame and morality was often trumpeted. Yet fame and heroism are not interdependent. If famous men could be emulated by lesser men, then the ranks of potential heroes stretched out infinitesimally.

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From the 1830s, reviewers began to note a startling rise in the publication of biographies of subjects with little or no claim to fame. Alongside the traditional lives of monarchs, politicians, military leaders, or literary celebrities, appeared biographies of missionaries, clergymen, prison visitors, surgeons, doctors, schoolmasters, ploughmen, temperance workers or shoemakers of varying degrees of fame, fortune, and ability. It is difficult to provide precise numbers of these works, since many of them were short sketches and pamphlets, and many were circulated only locally or within a network of family and friends. Yet a significant number of these works possess all the outward characteristics of the more traditional Victorian biographies. What unites them is the biographer's insistence on the subject's neglect by the public, whether he had once reached a degree of recognition or whether he had never achieved any fame whatsoever.

Critics varied in the extent to which they welcomed this trend. Negative reactions outweighed the positive ones. In 1833, Allan Cunningham complained that 'men about whom the world had no solicitude, have come into the market with their 'Life and Times', and we have been deluged with accounts of writings that were never read, and of books published but to be forgotten.'⁷⁹ A more vociferous condemnation of such developments in biography was expressed by the anonymous author of 'Biography gone mad', writing in *Blackwood's* in

⁷⁸ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (London, 1981), p. 251.

⁷⁹ Cunningham, 'Biographical and Critical History of the Literature of the Last Fifty Years', p. 851.

1856. Innumerable men of the noblest character, the writer argues, have lived in obscurity, yet 'some of the best men that ever lived were those whose lives had fewest incidents', and are therefore unsuited for a full-length commemoration. 'The biography of a respectable mediocrity is, it may be safely said, among the least interesting or useful of literary performances.'⁸⁰ In 1864, Charles Allston Collins felt – erroneously – that the trend was expiring. He looked back at the last twenty or thirty years when 'we used to write biographies about everybody. A man concerning whom there really was nothing whatever to tell [...] used formerly to be biographized in two large volumes, with a portrait-frontispiece in the first'.⁸¹ In fact, such biographies were, if anything, increasing. The *Dictionary of National Biography*, which included a wide spectrum of minor subjects, confirmed the importance of biographical subjects whose principal attraction did not lie in their fame.

Unbridled life-writing became a target of mockery in Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* (1888-9), which opens with George Pooter's declaration:

Why should I not publish my diary? I have often seen reminiscences of people I have never heard of, and I fail to see – because I do not happen to be a 'Somebody' – why my diary should not be interesting.⁸²

Grossmith's satire was *too* effective, as Pooter's diary does make interesting reading, and suggests the gossipy delight to be found in similar factual accounts. Indeed, the rise of autobiographies of inglorious subjects formed a parallel trend. J. G. Lockhart complained as early as 1827 about 'the mania for this garbage of Confessions, and Recollections, and Reminiscences, and Aniliana'.⁸³ A key difference, however, is that whereas the publication of an autobiography by a 'nobody' depended only on the goodwill of a publisher, the introduction of a hidden life to the public sphere in biographical form depended on the coordination of many more factors, from the existence of material on this private life to the

⁸⁰ [Unsigned], 'Biography Gone Mad', *BEM*, 79 (March 1856), p. 285.

⁸¹ Collins, 'Biography at a Discount', p. 158.

⁸² George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (London, 1999), p. 7.

⁸³ [J. G. Lockhart, attrib.], 'Autobiography', *QR*, 35 (Jan-March 1827), p. 164.

curiosity of a biographer. Biographers in these cases took on the unusual role of patron to their unknown subjects.

Critics alluded to these subjects in vague terms: they are labelled 'obscure', 'unknown', or 'mediocrities'. Discussions of the topic rarely defined precisely which biographies were being considered, or whether the entire range of biographies of the 'obscure' was being addressed. Some of the strongest attacks of the trend were aimed at domestic biographies. The lively author of 'Biography gone mad' was particularly incensed:

The number is perfectly sickening of bereaved husbands, sons, and fathers, who practice this strange alchemy on the penitential tears and devout breathings, the sick-bed utterances and dying ejaculations of sainted wives, mothers, and babes.⁸⁴

The attack is not entirely unjustified. Though there are numerous examples of highly accomplished domestic biography,⁸⁵ bereaved family members who had never written for the public before felt justified in commemorating their loved ones in pious sketches or drawn-out chapters. Another category was professional biography – lives of doctors, lawyers or scholars who had completed a fine, though not necessarily a great, career. Many of these were compiled by fellow professionals, and they share many of the same self-congratulatory and pious qualities of domestic biography.

Other subjects were not tied to their biographers by family or professional ties. There were lives of artists whom biographers felt deserved greater recognition. There were biographies of men and, to a smaller degree but by no means rare, biographies of women. Working-class men did not publish biographies of other working lives, but workers were commemorated by men of letters higher in the social scale and, even more frequently, by preachers. Evangelicals and Quakers were particularly prolific biographers of obscure lives, for reasons that shall be considered later. The category as a whole is extremely diverse. Like hero-worshipping biographies they celebrate the values of morality, temperance and hard

⁸⁴ 'Biography Gone Mad', *BEM* (1856), p. 286.

⁸⁵ See Tolley, *Domestic Biography*.

work, and frequently sought to inspire a similar desire for emulation amongst their readers. However, these biographies are explicitly defined against the contemporary fashion for biographies of ‘Great’, or famous, men.

Biographies of obscure lives did not begin with the Victorians. The eighteenth century witnessed the proliferation of biographies of subjects whom it would be hard to classify as ‘great’. Donald Stauffer considers some of these in *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England* (1941). A biographer writing in 1770 noted that there was already ‘at least as great a fondness for lowering exalted characters as there is for raising obscure ones’.⁸⁶ Two popular types of subjects were actresses, whether famous or not, and criminals, with similarly varying degrees of notoriety. Biographies of actresses fell out of favour during the nineteenth century. (James White noted in 1861 that ‘curiosity about the denizens of the stage has completely died out’.⁸⁷) Lives of criminals endured in the nineteenth century with reprints of *The Newgate Calendar* and, above all, endless sketches in the cheap press. There were, however, very few full-scale biographies of relatively minor criminals. The eighteenth-century interest in eccentric lives did survive in the Victorian period, as did a curiosity regarding poets from humble life. Few of these eighteenth-century biographies, however, were full-length accounts. There was also less of an interest in the eighteenth century in discussing the social role of obscure lives – they were usually read simply because they were interesting. With the Romantics came what Stauffer describes as a ‘democratic’ spirit that prepared the way for later biographies of inglorious subjects, and a greater desire to look at the place of the obscure in society.⁸⁸ The Victorians were the first, however, to publish them in such amounts and, more importantly, to pay such close scrutiny to their literary but also their social role.

⁸⁶ Thomas Martyn, “Life of John Martyn”, *Dissertations upon the Aeneids* (1770), p. ii; quoted in Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 133.

⁸⁷ [James White], ‘Biographia Dramatica’, *BEM*, 89 (February 1861) p. 219.

⁸⁸ Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 456.

Critics were by no means unanimously pleased with this new trend of biography. Their arguments were manifold. Many of them simply asserted the belief that the principle interest of biography was founded on a natural attraction to 'illustrious men'.⁸⁹ Johnson's life was deemed 'worth writing',⁹⁰ a biography of Thomas Campbell was 'right and proper'.⁹¹ To record the life of a local pastor of interest only to his 'bereaved congregation'⁹² was to flout all rules of proportion. They failed to perceive the interest of a biography celebrating a man whose achievements were few, and it is fair to say that many of these biographies are indeed monotonous.

The appearance of these works further destabilises biography since it was often unclear what outcome the biographer expected from the commemoration: did he seek enduring fame for his subject, or simply a temporary recognition? Much of the literature on biography since classical times had been devoted to the genre's ability to secure immortality for its subject. A biography could perpetuate the image of an illustrious man in a way that, according to Plutarch, 'neither picture, nor image of marble, nor arch of triumph, nor pillar, nor sumptuous sepulchre' could do.⁹³ It was understood, however, that this applied to men who had already achieved fame through their actions. There lurked behind the critics' scepticism unease with the fact that a genre could be used to create rather than confirm a reputation. It seemed no longer essential to achieve great things to achieve such commemoration, but simply to have stimulated the whim of a biographer.

The seeming randomness with which subjects were selected for commemoration and possible fame conferred on the biographer an almost divine role. The hero-worship of great

⁸⁹ [Unsigned], 'Biography', *BEM* (1851), p. 41.

⁹⁰ Thomas Carlyle, 'Boswell's Life of Johnson', *FM*, 5 (May 1832), p. 392.

⁹¹ Aytoun, 'Modern Biography', p. 224.

⁹² [Unsigned], 'Biography gone mad', p. 285.

⁹³ 'Amyot to the Readers', *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1908), vol. I, p. 8.

and illustrious men was deemed to resist the impersonal forces of history by celebrating the achievements of individuals. Yet it could also resemble the 'survival of the fittest', in which the strongest men endured over the weaker. Traditional biography involved a 'judicious and discriminating selection of character'.⁹⁴ It is impossible to make claims for the direct influence of Darwin on nineteenth-century biography. It is possible to suggest, however, that developments in natural science throughout the period were absorbed into non-fiction accounts of man's relationship with his environment, much as they were in contemporary fiction.⁹⁵ Biographies of the inglorious implied that a higher power could still pluck out individuals for particular attention at will. Those who condemned the trend returned constantly to the importance of hierarchies, order and proportion.

Yet there were also many critics to encourage and applaud biographers who celebrated 'obscure' individuals. The assumption that hidden lives were uneventful was often rejected. An anonymous *Blackwood's* writer argued that 'the life of some very obscure individual may supply admirable matter for the reality of romance'.⁹⁶ Variations on the phrase 'the romance of real life' were abundantly used by biographers to justify their endeavours. The words suggest the paradox that it is often necessary to allude to the fictional in order to perceive that reality has its interest. This was an important justification for the trend, and it was closely linked to parallel developments in fiction, notably in the works of George Eliot, discussed in more depth below.

Part of this was tied to the biographers' conviction that there was a thirst amongst the public to find models not only amongst the great and often remote figures of history but also among individuals who might well have been their neighbours or friends. Traditional

⁹⁴ [Unsigned], 'Biography', *BEM* (1851), p. 42.

⁹⁵ See Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (Cambridge, 2000).

⁹⁶ [Unsigned], 'Contemporary Literature', *BEM* (1879), p. 485.

biography risked widening the chasm between illustrious subjects and far less illustrious readers. Lives of more humble subjects could often echo the readers' own environment, and reflect their experience. Indeed, in the case of biographies of local worthies – devoted preachers or benevolent doctors – the work often did function as a communal autobiography by portraying a closely-knit network.

The accumulation of biographies of humble men and women could provide individuals with a sense of purpose. Edwin Paxton Hood pauses in his study of biography to insist that

there is greatness concealed as well as exhibited – there is the greatness of the unknown and obscure, as well as the well known and celebrated. Over the achievements of most men, we are compelled to drop the pall, or time drops it for us.⁹⁷

Hood's *The Uses of Biography: Romantic, Philosophic, and Didactic* (1852) is one of the few Victorian works devoted to the theory of biography. Though it is often concerned with 'great men', it maintains the idea that 'every life has some central lesson, and this might be obtained, distilled, and presented to the reader'.⁹⁸ Hood enacted this idea in his own works of collective biographies that included several obscure lives alongside more famous ones.⁹⁹ One of the running strands in Hood's discussions of the obscure is that this hidden greatness formed the backbone of the nation. To uncover these lives and celebrate them was to pay tribute to the masses labouring in darkness.

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Victorian biographies of 'obscure' individuals appeared partly in response to recent and contemporary debates about the humble and the hidden as a subject of representation within the genre of biography, but also of poetry, historiography and fiction. Though each of these deserve a full-length treatment of their own, it is useful to present, briefly, four figures

⁹⁷ Hood, *The Uses of Biography*, p. 92.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See Brian Maidment, 'Popular Exemplary Biography in the Nineteenth Century: Edwin Paxton Hood and His Books', *PS*, 7 (September 1984), pp. 148-67.

who directly influenced these nineteenth-century biographies: Samuel Johnson, Thomas Gray, George Eliot and Thomas Carlyle.

It was Samuel Johnson more than any other biographer who first gave expression to the value of obscure lives. In a 1750 issue of *The Rambler*, he wrote:

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. [...] The scholar who passed his life among his books, the merchant who conducted only his own affairs, the priest, whose sphere of action was not extended beyond that of duty, are considered as no proper objects of public regard [...]. But this notion arises from false measures of excellence and dignity, and must be eradicated by considering, that in the esteem of uncorrupted reason, what is of most use is of most value.¹⁰⁰

Numerous biographers quoted, or alluded to, these words. Johnson places the emphasis on the didactic potential of biography, which fits into the wider eighteenth-century humanist impulse. Biography can reassert a common humanity. The examples that Johnson provides focus roughly on what would later be defined as the middle classes: the passage does not seek to champion humble labourers, though it does not exclude that possibility.

Almost unwittingly, the passage also taps into one of the difficulties of the topic. His depiction of the scholar, merchant and priest suggests an isolation that seems self-willed from the public sphere ('among his books', 'his own affairs'). They are also defined not by their morals or character but by their active contribution to society. Public regard has ignored them even as they have ignored public regard. It is not biography's role to alter the status of these subjects, but simply to readjust public opinion on hidden labour. This is an important idea that runs through many of the later biographies, and culminates in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

One of the consequent difficulties for the biographer involves finding a balance between the particularity of the subject and the manner in which he or she is representative of other similarly hidden lives. Johnson's commemorative poem of his friend, 'On the Death of

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Johnson, 'The dignity and usefulness of biography', *Yale Edition of Johnson: The Rambler* (London, 1969), pp. 318-23.

Dr. Robert Levet' (1783), seeks such a balance.¹⁰¹ The form and language of the poem, hymn-like, mirror the modest and self-effacing qualities of the doctor ('obscurely wise', 'the power of art without the show'). Levet is mourned as an individual, but the poem also serves to reflect on a more general human condition of quiet toil and gentle decay ('as on we toil from day to day / [...] our social comforts drop away'). Part of the value of the life lies in its ability to evoke this common humanity. In his essays, Johnson continually draws attention to overlooked lives. In his *Life of Pope*, he praises 'On Mrs. Corbet, who died of a cancer in her breast'. He continues: 'of such a character, which the dull overlook and the gay despise, it was fit that the value should be made known and the dignity established.'¹⁰² There is a constant sense that paying tribute to humble lives ennobles the public which deigns to notice them.

The poem also suggests the tension between a greater talent paying tribute to a lesser one, a pattern that is reproduced in many full-length biographies of humble subjects. Johnson complimented George III by declaring that 'it is the privilege of real greatness not to be afraid of diminution by condescending to the notice of little things'.¹⁰³ The phrase alludes to the virtues of patronage, and patronage is often implicit in the biographical commemoration of obscure lives. Johnson's full-length *The Life of Savage* is not, strictly, the life of an 'obscure' person – Savage had gained notoriety through his poetic efforts but, above all, through the scandal surrounding his parentage. The biography is, however, the life of a failure, sympathetically though honestly told by a friend. As different modes of patronage diminished, from the church to the state, the biographer took on the power to confer status and, in some cases, absolution, on the subjects he deemed fit. Johnson provided an important

¹⁰¹ Samuel Johnson, 'On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet', *The Poems of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 232-5.

¹⁰² Samuel Johnson, 'Pope', *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; With Critical Observations on Their Works* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 86-7.

¹⁰³ Samuel Johnson, in *Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications*, ed. Allen T. Hazen (London, 1973), p. 3.

sanction for other biographers to explore similar lives, who often pointed to him as an example to support their own project.

Poetry was often a more fitting mode for celebrating forgotten or hidden lives than biography, if only because there was often simply not enough material to build a full-length narrative. One poem is alluded to by nineteenth-century biographers of 'obscure' lives more than any other: Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751). (Unsurprisingly, it was the only poem by Gray that Samuel Johnson enjoyed.) Biographers rarely went beyond quoting the phrase 'mute inglorious Milton' or the stanza

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor.

They did not engage with the poem any further. To some extent, the phrases simply provided an attractively succinct epigraph to a biography of an obscure life, and offered a poetic justification of their project.

There are, however, further comparisons to be made between the poem and the later biographies. Whereas Johnson paid tribute to the obscure as a general category, Gray's 'Elegy' provided a model for paying homage to the poor. The narrator's attitude to the poor is an ambiguous one. On the one hand, the reader is invited to admire the 'useful toil', and to consider that 'many a gem of the purest ray' lies in the 'dark unfathomed caves' of the ocean. The buried gem, which also echoes the common image of the 'diamond in the rough', was one that biographers responded to, and religious biographers in particular. On the other hand, the narrator does not argue that they would have benefited from greater fame during their life. What at first seems like a neglect of talent becomes a precious resource protected from the vagaries of public life, such as 'ingenuous shame', 'Luxury and Pride' and the 'madding

crowd's ignoble strife'. Biographers of humble life also tended to draw attention to hidden labour whilst urging the benefits of a condition of obscurity. The suggestion in Gray's poem that human potential is wasted due to the lack of educational opportunities ('Knowledge to their eyes her ample page / Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll') is not picked up by the biographers. In Victorian biographies of humble men and women, the subject's value is affirmed in spite of their poverty, and questions of politics or social conditioning are sidelined.

The poem displays the same tension between display and concealment that runs throughout biographies of 'obscure' lives. The poem, like the biographies, acts as a form of posthumous compensation for the subject's neglect, an alternative to the more official (though insubstantial) means of recognition that are 'heraldry, the pomp of power', the 'storied urn or animated bust'. Yet it is unclear how far the reader is desired to engage with the obscure life, whether of the labourer or of the unknown youth at the close of the poem. The Epitaph, which evokes a 'youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown', bids the reader 'no father seek his merits to disclose'. Once again, it is the act of paying tribute to such lives – to give the 'passing tribute of a sigh' – that is important, rather than the posthumous recognition of the subject. The emphasis is on reversing the mockery and disdain of 'Ambition' and 'Grandeur' and on the act of homage, rather than on the life itself, which, in the poem, remains notoriously elusive.

Thomas Gray was not, of course, the only poet to draw attention to humble lives. It is clear that later developments in biography also depended to a large extent on the depiction of humble lives in Romantic poetry, and in Wordsworth in particular. There are numerous evocations of obscure, humble and hidden lives in Wordsworth's poetry and essays. 'She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways', one of the 'Lucy poems', for example, describes one who 'lived unknown', 'A Maid whom there were none to praise / [...] Half hidden from the

eye!'. The poem depicts the expanse between public insignificance and private importance ('she is in her grave, and, oh, / The difference to me!'). It is worth noting that, again, the final image is of one individual's response to the hidden life rather than the substance of that life itself. It is the recognition of that life by another that gives it both its importance and its meaning.

More generally, Wordsworth had defended the idea that there was poetry to be found in 'situations from common life', and to be expressed in 'language really used by men'.¹⁰⁴ The Romantic spirit was essential to the development of biographies of 'obscure' lives, from the belief in the possibilities of the individual to a celebration of the hidden beauties of nature. In these ways the Romantic poets prepared the way for later discussions on the representation of obscure lives. Nevertheless, there are almost no cases of these biographers referring to Romantic poets as an influence behind their work. If the influence was felt, it was never declared.

Victorian fiction absorbed many of these influences, and the novels of George Eliot provided a far more potent influence for contemporary biographers. A passage that resonates with many of these works is the end of *Middlemarch* (1871-2), where the narrator declares that 'the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who live faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs'.¹⁰⁵ The eponymous hero of *Felix Holt* (1866) questions the nature of heroism and proposes 'a monument to the faithful who were not famous, who are precious as the continuity of the sunbeams is precious, though some of them fall unseen and on barrenness'.¹⁰⁶ George Eliot was by no means the only novelist to

¹⁰⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Oxford, 1998), p. 357.

¹⁰⁵ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford, 1986), p. 825.

¹⁰⁶ George Eliot, *Felix Holt* (Oxford, 1980), p. 161.

dwell on hidden lives – Dickens brought into his fiction a vast range of marginal characters, and the social problem novelists scrutinised the working classes in depth. Yet Eliot does not simply represent such individuals: her novels include reflections on the moral purpose of celebrating obscure lives more than those of other contemporary novelists.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the vast majority of biographies of ‘obscure’ lives appeared after George Eliot began to publish her novels. The principal ideas that biographers took from George Eliot, beyond a further justification for celebrating hidden lives, was that hidden lives benefited the nation and that recognizing their endeavours and understanding their existences developed the faculty of empathy and, consequently, was of moral benefit. One biographer boiled these lessons down to a more traditional substance. The collective biography *Women of Worth* (1859) upheld George Eliot’s ideas as an inspiration for representing the lives of ‘more commonplace people’. George Eliot is never named nor her works directly addressed. Nevertheless, the preface quotes a large passage from *Adam Bede*, published that year. The reader is encouraged to learn that

fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions [...]. There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can’t afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my every-day fellows [...].¹⁰⁷

The passage in *Adam Bede* occurs in the context of a broader discussion of the representation of commonplace life, and dwells in particular on Dutch painting.¹⁰⁸ The writer in *Women of Worth* has omitted all artistic considerations. Eliot’s words are twisted to express a far more simple moral prescription. Oddly, the editor concludes that the lessons of the passage are ‘be quiet’ and ‘be cheerful’. The preface increasingly downplays the importance of ‘the great and titled’ and seeks instead to ‘draw lessons from more commonplace people’, and to ‘show something of the poetry and charm of every-day life’. An initial desire to participate in the

¹⁰⁷ [Anonymous], *Women of Worth*, p. v-vi.

¹⁰⁸ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 165-6.

celebration of ‘every-day life’ is dissipated through the ensuing vignettes, which are narrowly didactic and formulaic. Nevertheless, Eliot remained an important inspiration.

Several reviewers praised Eliot’s novels by comparing them to biography. That they read ‘like a reminiscence of real life’ was part of their charm. *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) was complimented as being ‘in style so truthful that we seem to be reading an actual biography’.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Elizabeth Gaskell referred to *Mary Barton* (1848) as a ‘fictitious biography’, using a quotation from Carlyle.¹¹⁰ (That novels were often praised by being compared to biographies, whereas successful biographies were praised as having the vigour of a fictional work is a sign of the confusion surrounding what function each genre was expected to have.) Though Eliot’s reviewer seems naïve (no nineteenth-century biography even closely resembles *Scenes* in either style or content), such comparisons gave the biographers more encouragement to pursue similar ideas.

In fact, biographers and novelists shared many of the paradoxes involved in representing ‘common’ lives. The word ‘common’ itself could refer to either ordinary or a social category, the masses. George Eliot and the biographers who responded to her shared the belief that the combined, hidden, efforts of the obscure contributed to the progress of the nation. Yet they were faced with the difficulty of singling out particular individuals within the masses. ‘Hidden lives’ is a group defined by the invisibility of its members. To single out members of that group disrupts the entire category, and affirms that individuals rather than groups shape history. The claim to uncover the romance of common life is also paradoxical: it advertises the interest of the ordinary and proceeds by focusing on what, within the ordinary, has the most literary potential. As Alison Booth writes, ‘artistic greatness, at least, seems antithetical to the run-of-the-mill, much as heroism would seem by definition out-of-the-

¹⁰⁹ [Unsigned review], *SR*, 5 (May 29, 1858), pp. 566-7.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (London, 2005), p. 5, from Carlyle, ‘Biography’, p. 255.

ordinary'.¹¹¹ Eliot struggles in her works to maintain an emphasis on the commonplace, as it is continually disrupted by unusual characters (almost all the principal characters in *Middlemarch*, for example, are described as unconventional). Biographers faced similar difficulties in reconciling the ordinary and representative qualities of their subject with the demands of narrative.

Yet the nature of contemporary literature as a whole justified the development of biography of 'obscure' lives. F. M. Owen, in a review of the life of a minor female writer, Annie Keary, wrote in 1882 that

the time has come in literature when it is no longer necessary to offer excuses for the publication of uneventful lives which contain no startling incident and no arresting facts. The interest of our own day, in fiction, poetry, and biography, has extended from the outward region of fact to the inward region of thought; and it only needs that a memoir shall truly delineate its subject, and that that subject shall have been in true relations to its human surroundings, to make it welcome.¹¹²

The passage reads like a manifesto for Romantic literature rather than a definition of biography, which would seem at first glance to be the genre most concerned with 'incident' and 'facts'. The revolution in thought that altered fiction and poetry also modified life-writing and promised to democratise biographical subjects. The tone is celebratory and filled with a sense of the possibilities of the genre, which is deemed capable of expounding truths and therefore of engaging with contemporary debates with a new seriousness and authority.

Thomas Carlyle emerges as an almost constant reference in nineteenth-century biographies of 'obscure' individuals. Indeed, a study of this biographical trend is to a large extent a study of Carlyle's influence in contemporary biography, which was more far-reaching than is commonly understood. Many of the biographers of these lives were in some way connected to Carlyle, or were known to have admired his works, and numerous prefaces

¹¹¹ Booth, *Greatness Engendered*, p. 108.

¹¹² F. M. Owen, 'Memoir of Annie Keary', *The Academy*, 552 (December 2, 1882), p. 390.

quote him as an inspiration. Though religious biographers were more likely to draw on Thomas Gray, almost all others demonstrated some awareness of the Prophet.

It is perhaps surprising that this is the case, given the close association made between Carlyle and the hero-worship of great men. Carlyle's stance on hero-worship was in fact more nuanced than he is often given credit for. The importance that Carlyle gives to Great man ought not to be underestimated: he accorded to such individuals a power to shape history and to guide the masses, and constantly reiterated his own attraction to influential men. Nevertheless, his definition of a 'hero' was flexible. In *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, one of the key aspects of the hero is his sincerity. Consequently, Carlyle asks: 'if Hero mean *sincere* men, why may not every one of us be a Hero?'¹¹³ There 'needs no great soul to make a hero', nor indeed is a privileged social status essential, as many of Carlyle's heroes emanated from humble backgrounds. One of the most powerful moments in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* occurs when Carlyle pauses from his discussion of Cromwell to evoke:

the noble silent men, scattered here and there, each in his department; silently thinking, silently working, whom no Morning Newspaper makes mention of! They are the salt of the Earth. A country that has none or few of these is in a bad way.¹¹⁴

The passage displays Carlyle's attraction to silence ('it alone is great; all else is small'), which provides respite from the 'dislocated age' and sham, and runs throughout his works. What most biographers picked up, however, was the combination of a praise of labour with a sense that the nation's health depends on such hidden work. The passage is the one most often quoted by the biographers, and, removed from its context, is adapted to subjects who, however different, embody the value of hard work and reflect a strong image of the nation.

Carlyle was also the first to express clearly the artistic potential of biographies of these lives. Previous discussions of the topic had tended to dwell on their didactic value.

¹¹³ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 109.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 192.

Carlyle went further by drawing attention to the power of such subjects that could rival fictional forms:

Miserablest mortals, doomed for picking pockets, have a whole five-act Tragedy in them, in that dumb pain, as they go to the gallows, unregarded.¹¹⁵

‘Tragedy’, here, is partly shorthand for intensity. The phrase, however, makes a dual appeal to the reader, who is asked to recognise that humble lives contain their share of intensity and pathos, but is also made aware of the narratives stored up in such existences. Though such passages suggest that Carlyle was principally concerned with lower-class subjects, they justify a wide range of biographical subjects. Carlyle’s own biography of a failed and second-rate life, *The Life of John Sterling* (1851) provided an opportunity for him to test these ideas, and resulted in the most powerful Victorian biography of an ‘obscure’ subject.

Carlyle’s theories were supported by recent developments in historiography. Though some historians such as Stubbs continued to assert that the historian’s role was to establish ‘some definite idea of the characters of the great men of the period he is employed upon’,¹¹⁶ other trends counterbalanced this. Social history gained currency. In ‘On History’, Carlyle insisted that ‘the inventions and traditions, the daily habits that regulate and support our existence, are the work not of Dracos and Hampdens, but of Phoenician mariners, of Italian masons and Saxon metallurgists [...] and all the long-forgotten train of artists and artisans, who from the first have been jointly teaching us how to think and how to act’.¹¹⁷ Macaulay supported his research with a wide range of primary material including tracts and ballads, local legends and popular culture, and drew on a wide range of historical subjects. He played a key part in circulating the idea that historical research should concern itself with those ‘noiseless revolutions’ whose ‘progress is rarely indicated by what historians are pleased to

¹¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), vol. II, p. 232.

¹¹⁶ William Stubbs, *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis* (London, 1867), vol. II, p. viii.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle, ‘On History’, in *A Carlyle Reader* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 58.

call important events'.¹¹⁸ In his *Short History of the English People*, published 1874, John Richard Green stated that, instead of 'conventional figures of military and political history', he had 'had to find a place for figures little heeded in common history – the figures of the missionary, the poet, the printer, the merchant, and the philosopher'.¹¹⁹ The works of both Macaulay and Green became bestsellers, which suggests the readiness of the public to accept these more inclusive projects.

Parallel developments added further interest to 'obscure' subjects. Women, such as Agnes Strickland and Julia Kavanagh, further broadened the range of historical writing. Sociology and statistical research were also coming of age. Henry Mayhew labelled his documentary investigations into 'London Labour and the London Poor' (1849-52) 'street biographies'. This ebullition generated an unprecedented interest in lives that had previously been marginalised in official discourse. By selecting individual subjects rather than groups, biographers avoided the more political implications of these historical narratives. Social conditioning plays a very small part in most biographies, or, when it is evoked, it is as an obstacle to be surmounted. However, the fact that subjects traditionally eclipsed in history books were chosen for full-length commemoration, and that these biographies sold well, was in part due to these parallel developments.

The growth of cultural history was closely bound with the expansion of female biography, as James Edward Austen-Leigh makes clear in his 1870 memoir of Jane Austen. He brings out the natural affinity between this relatively new form of historiography that contrasted with the traditional narration of battles and kings, and the narration of female, necessarily obscure, lives. Austen-Leigh's suggestion that 'there may be little things, but time gives a certain importance to trifles [...]'. The most ordinary articles of domestic life are

¹¹⁸ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'History', *The Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches of Lord Macaulay* (London, 1889), p. 156.

¹¹⁹ John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London, 1874), p. vi.

looked on with some interest, if they are brought to light after being long buried'¹²⁰ could apply to either venture. The passage justifies a comparison between the contemporary revision of national historiography and the writing of female lives.

¹²⁰ James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), p. 13.

Chapter Two

'Quiet and Uneventful'? Biographies of Women

'How few of the memoirs and biographical sketches which load the shelves of our libraries, record the lives of women!'¹²¹ Arabella Stuart's complaint appeared in 1852, five years before Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* changed the manner in which women's lives were written, read and discussed. Indeed, a glance at the shelves of single-subject female biography until the later half of the nineteenth century reveals the imbalance between male and female lives. The eighteenth-century thirst for biographies of actresses and *chroniques scandaleuses* had largely subsided, and female biography generally took the form either of simple and pious sketches or of collective biography, from the heavily didactic to those begging for a re-evaluation of women's place in society. Accounts of female historical figures by writers such as Agnes Strickland and Julia Kavanagh were an important nineteenth-century development, but were rather condescendingly denied the status of History and given the more amateurish label of 'memoirs'.¹²² By and large, however, a rapid survey of Victorian female biography tends to confirm Samuel Smiles's statement that 'we do not often hear of great women, as we do of great men. It is of good women that we mostly hear'.¹²³

¹²¹ Arabella Stuart, *The Lives of Mrs. Ann H. Judson and Mrs. Sarah B. Judson* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1852), p. iii.

¹²² See Rohan Maitzen, *Gender, Genre, and Victorian Historical Writing* (London, 1998).

¹²³ Samuel Smiles, *Character* (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 43.

Two concerns dominated discussions of female biography: one with social and the other with practical implications. The appearance of female lives in print provoked debates concerning the propriety of such an intrusion into the public sphere by individuals who were generally expected to confine themselves to the private sphere. Those women who embarked on a further act of self-exposure through autobiographical writing – and many did – risked further condemnations of indecency. As Joanne Shattock writes, ‘self-definition and self-exploration implied self-confidence, a sense of the writing self and the acknowledgement of a public role with which they were uncomfortable’.¹²⁴ Women shared the distrust of many men regarding biography’s capacity to distort their experiences. Yet if biography was to be feared, autobiography, in the words of Margaret Oliphant (herself an autobiographer), was a ‘terrible instrument of self-murder’.¹²⁵

Life-writing critics have regularly combined discussions of female autobiography and biographies of female lives. There are many parallels, illustrated by the fact that many biographers attempted to pass off their works as autobiographies. Biographers and autobiographers also shared a certain shyness: more biographies of women were printed for private circulation than of any other category of biography. Yet it is also useful to distinguish between the two. Biography offered compromise. It enabled the life of a woman to be narrated through a mediator, which dispelled suggestions of the subject’s improper self-exhibition, even if the biographer used autobiographical fragments. Women in biographies seem to be commemorated almost despite themselves. This would seem to make biography a far less exciting means of exploring female experience than autobiography, all the more so as many of the works were written by men. Yet the choice of a female subject for a full-length biography meant that these women could trespass on traditionally male territory. Under the

¹²⁴ Shattock, ‘Victorian Women as Writers and Readers of (Auto)biography’, p. 142.

¹²⁵ Margaret Oliphant, ‘Martineau’s *Autobiography*’, *BEM*, 121 (April 1877), p. 472.

veil of public sanction that biography confers, a broad array of female behaviour was in fact exhibited.

The second, more practical, difficulty involved the lack of available material a biographer could draw on. With very few exceptions, even those women who experienced successful public careers played out a large part of their life in the private sphere. Documents relating to their lives were less abundant, had not been preserved, or, when they had, were often replete with ‘domestic’ details. In 1859, Mrs. Ellis compiled sketches of *The Mothers of Great Men*, but was forced to state that since it was agreed that ‘the finest elements of feminine goodness are retiring and unobtrusive in their nature [...] there may have been no record kept [...]’.¹²⁶ Biographers were repeatedly presented with the challenge of constructing a narrative from a life that contained much of the mundane and the apparently trivial. This was the case for both famous and obscure subjects. In his 1870 memoir of Jane Austen, James Edward Austen-Leigh similarly lamented ‘the extreme scantiness of the materials out of which it must be constructed’.¹²⁷ One of the reasons for the disproportionate number of female collective biography over single-subject works is simply that it was difficult to pad out the narrative beyond a short sketch.

Though these difficulties were revealing about the roles assigned to women, biographers rarely took up the chance to question the status quo. In the collective biography *The Women of England* (1839), Sarah Ellis makes the typical declaration that ‘apparently insignificant detail of familiar and ordinary life’ demonstrates the ‘often-repeated truth – that “trifles make the sum of human things.”’¹²⁸ Tentatively, Ellis argues that women must also be included in the group of overlooked individuals to whom the prosperity of the nation must be owed due to their ability to uphold ‘the moral worth of our country’. Yet she does not extend

¹²⁶ Mrs. Ellis, *The Mothers of Great Men* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), p. 4.

¹²⁷ Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, p. 229.

¹²⁸ Mrs. Ellis, *The Women of England, their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1839), p. 1.

such remarks to a call for the reassessment of contemporary values. Such works, of which there are many, altered the biographical landscape by the fact of their existence, but rarely made controversial requests for broader female opportunities.

Three groups of female subjects attracted a significant amount of biographical attention: women writers, nuns, and female missionaries. Women with other roles were commemorated, such as schoolmistresses or nurses, but only in relatively rare and isolated occurrences. Biographies of pious mothers or daughters were of course published in abundance, but raise different issues.¹²⁹ An advantage of the three groups is that they were published in sufficient numbers to bring out recurrent patterns and concerns. The groups also offer perspectives on three different types of female behaviour: women who straddled public and private responsibilities (writers); women who seemed to carry the idea of private female lives to an extreme (nuns); and women who lived startlingly active lives (missionaries).

A survey of these groups reveals two principal ideas. One is that the strong contrast between biographies of famous men and obscure men no longer holds as strongly when the subjects are female. For this reason, biographies of female subjects ought to be considered separately from biographies of obscure working men, neglected writers, or hidden professionals. Biographers of famous women represented their subjects as between the public and the private in a way that resonated with biographers of more obscure women. It is therefore appropriate to pause initially on Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which set an important precedent for this dual depiction. Moreover, the biographers shy from inscribing their efforts within the wider tradition of biography stretching from Samuel Johnson through Thomas Carlyle to Leslie Stephen that challenged the over-representation of Great Lives in the depiction of the nation. There are many parallels between biographies of these women and

¹³¹ See Introduction.

biographies of other 'obscure' lives, but the lives of women show less awareness of these them. Despite this similarity in the biographical representation of public women and private women, the obscurity of these subjects gave the biographer license to explore feminine behaviour in unusually frank terms. These are works that avoid controversy, but that work hard to reconfigure the boundaries of private and public life.

Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857)

In an article on 'Women's Biographies', Sybil Oldfield declared that 'the writing of full-length biographies of individual women, in English, by women was inaugurated by Elizabeth Gaskell's testimony to Charlotte Brontë'.¹³⁰ Single-subject biographies of women by women were, in fact, written before Gaskell's narrative.¹³¹ The statement testifies, however, to the groundbreaking effect of the work. Margaret Oliphant felt that Gaskell had 'originated in her bewilderment [...] a new kind of biography',¹³² and many agreed with Henry Fothergill Chorley when he could 'not recollect a life of a woman by a woman so well executed'.¹³³ Gaskell's life of Brontë (1816-1855) remains the Victorian biography most frequently republished, and it is the only nineteenth-century biography of a woman to have been accorded regular in-depth scrutiny.

The work's first printing sold out rapidly. Two months later, in May 1857, clouds of controversy gathered, as (some justified) accusations of libel resulted from Gaskell's indiscretions concerning Branwell's tormented affair with a married woman, and the identification of Cowan Bridge as the original for the appalling Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. Public retractions were published, apologies made, and revisions embarked upon, so that the

¹³⁰ Sybil Oldfield, 'Women's Biographies', in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, ed. Margaretta Jolly (London, 2001), vol. II, p. 949.

¹³¹ See D.C. nos. 8; 9; 21.

¹³² Margaret Oliphant, 'The Sisters Brontë', in *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign* (London: Hirst & Blackett, 1897), p. 26.

¹³³ [Henry Fothergill Chorley], *The Athenaeum*, 1536 (April 4, 1857), p. 427.

work remained steadily in the public eye. The vividness of the subject's portrayal together with the intense debate surrounding it make *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* one of the most significant Victorian biographies. The work is particularly relevant in a discussion of biographies of 'obscure' women for two reasons. It gave a uniquely powerful and influential treatment of the theme of the divided woman, torn between private and public life and, as part of an attempt to reconcile the two, it presented to readers the paradoxical construct of the obscure yet famous woman.

*

Discussion of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* upon its publication was instantly dominated by the debate over how far Gaskell's Brontë embodied or transgressed accepted models of feminine behaviour. The manner in which Elizabeth Gaskell used biography to prompt a public reassessment of her frequently maligned friend's works and, more importantly, character, has been extensively discussed. Critical appreciations of the novels take a decidedly second place behind a depiction of Brontë's life that would make readers 'honour the woman'.¹³⁴

Gaskell was neither the first nor the last biographer to weigh the claims of intellect and public achievement against those of traditional female virtues. Collective biographies provide numerous examples. *Memorable Women* (1854) presents 'examples of wives and mothers, who have done their duty under difficulties and temptations; and if in some cases genius has accompanied high moral endowments, we have all the more reason to be gratified by the picture of combined excellence of heart and mind'.¹³⁵ Gaskell's desire to make Brontë 'the friend the daughter the sister the wife'¹³⁶ better known and admired is closely echoed in Mrs. Owen's *The Heroines of Domestic Life* (1861), which insists that 'feminine heroism

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell to George Smith, 31 May 1855, repr. *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p. 345

¹³⁵ Mrs. Newton Crosland, *Memorable Women: The Story of Their Lives* (London: David Bogue, 1854), p. vii.

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell to Ellen Nussey, 6 September 1855, repr. *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, p. 376.

comprehends those elements which make better wives, mothers, and daughters' and lists these characteristics as 'devotion, fidelity, piety, unselfishness, in their highest culmination'.¹³⁷ Such works upheld the Victorian idea of the 'separate spheres', which saw women confined to the domestic sphere and serving as helpmeets to their more active male counterparts. Whatever controversies *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* stirred, Gaskell creates the impression that her portrait exists within this biographical tradition. The word 'duty' resonates throughout the work: the feeling of 'Duty being paramount to pleasure [...] lay at the foundation of Charlotte's character'.¹³⁸ [Fig. 3]

[Fig. 3] 'The Worthy Daughter – Charlotte Brontë' in *Women of Worth* (1859), inspired by Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Brontë. The subtitle reads: 'Her aged father had been becoming gradually blind from the access of cataract, and to read, and write, and care for him, especially to comfort and cheer him, under this sore privation, became her leading concern', p. 18.



Within this conventional frame, Gaskell suggests that the rigid application of standards of female submission can be questioned. An obsession with duty reveals Brontë's 'over-ascetic spirit, betokening a loss of healthy balance in either body or mind' (I, 152). Gaskell returns to the theme of duty:

I allude to the subject again here, in order that the reader may remember the gnawing, private cares, which she had to bury in her own heart; and the pain of which could only be smothered for a time under the diligent fulfilment of present duty (I, 302).

¹³⁷ Mrs. Owen, *The Heroines of Domestic Life* (London: Routledge, Warne, & Routledge, 1861), p. vii.

¹³⁸ Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*; vol. I, p. 221; vol. I, p. 182.

The heavy claims on the reader's attention ('we have seen', 'the reader may remember') seem superfluous, given the omnipresence of Gaskell's theme. This very insistence requests that the reader pay particular attention to the passage. The language is not that of quiet acceptance but of tortuous repression ('gnawing', 'bury', 'smothered'). The entire abnegation of the self is not celebrated. Any woman who strictly followed the conduct books, Gaskell almost implies, obscures herself.

One of Gaskell's important contributions to female biography was to frame the life with a conventional account of female duty in such a manner that hints of discontent or atypical behaviour could be included without making the biography liable to attacks of impropriety. With the exception of Harriet Martineau, who picked up on the underlying narrative of female self-sacrifice, critics read Gaskell's version of Brontë as an exemplar of womanly virtue. For Charles Kingsley, the biography was 'the picture of a valiant woman made perfect by sufferings';¹³⁹ George Henry Lewes saw the work as being 'full of encouragement and healthy teaching, a lesson in duty and self-reliance'.¹⁴⁰ *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* set a precedent for biographies of women that could convincingly be read in two very different ways.

Gaskell could not, and did not, ignore that part of her subject's life that had brought her renown. Though women in the nineteenth century participated in literary activities to the extent that Oliphant felt justified in describing the age as 'the age of female novelists',¹⁴¹ female writers remained controversial. Many men, and a not insubstantial number of women, agreed with Robert Southey, who wrote to Brontë that 'literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less

¹³⁹ Charles Kingsley to Elizabeth Gaskell, 4 August 1857, repr. *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, ed. T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington (Oxford, 1932), vol. IV, pp. 222-3.

¹⁴⁰ George Henry Lewes to Elizabeth Gaskell, 15 April 1857, repr. *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight (London, 1954), vol. II, p. 316.

¹⁴¹ [Margaret Oliphant], 'Modern Novelists – Great and Small', *BEM*, 77 (May 1855), p. 555.

leisure will she have for it even as an accomplishment and a recreation' (I, 170). At the same time, however, the novel provided an ideal outlet for the literary talents of women, who could draw on the domestic concerns of the female sphere. Though many women chose to write under male pseudonyms, women writers were by no means universally condemned as lacking in respectability. Throughout the centuries, the rising number of works of collective biographies testifies to the growing desire (usually on the part of women, but also of men) to begin to take account of a significant female literary tradition.

Gaskell was caught between the two judgments of the female writer. Consequently, her novelist subject becomes divided. She insisted that 'the more she was known the more people would honour her as a woman, separate from her character as authoress.'¹⁴² Gaskell discusses the separation of Brontë's roles in an important passage:

Henceforward Charlotte Brontë's existence becomes divided into two parallel currents - her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Brontë, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character - not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled. When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him. He takes a portion of that time which has hitherto been devoted to some other study or pursuit [...] But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice [...] And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others. In an humble and faithful spirit must she labour to do what is not impossible, or God would not have set her to do it (II, 49-50).

Charlotte Brontë's assumption of a pseudonym allows Gaskell to emphasise these divisions. 'Currer Bell' was the writer's public name, and 'Charlotte Brontë' her private one. Yet the public pseudonym was precisely the name that enabled the writer to cling on to obscurity, whilst, by the time Gaskell published her biography, 'Charlotte Brontë', unmasked, was the name by which the author of *Jane Eyre* had become known. The apparently clear separation

¹⁴² Elizabeth Gaskell to George Smith, 31 May 1855, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, p. 345.

that Gaskell projects on to her subject's life is in fact unstable, as public and private merge into one another.

Nevertheless, Gaskell accepts that Brontë's assumption of the two roles of woman and author divides her between the public and the private spheres, even as she is ambivalent regarding such a division of labour. In the passage, Gaskell subtly manoeuvres so as to realign Brontë's more public activities with the private sphere. Just as the domestic responsibility must be accepted without choice, so is the writing of novels a matter of God-given duty. By alluding to the parable of the talents, the biographer removes the suggestion that Brontë's literary work sprang from self-indulgence. Just as a woman was meant to assume the role of nurturer, so does the literary activity become a feminised act of ministering ('use and service of others') set out by God. Women's literary activity becomes acceptable through its redefinition as yet another feminine 'duty' and act of sacrifice ('must she labour').

The biographer does not question that woman's proper place is the home, yet there are hints of rebellion at the core of the text, through an allusion to women's lack of choice and the greater flexibility of male careers. The allusion to God-given talents was usually employed to reaffirm women's belonging to the obscurity of the home and confinement to domestic duties. Yet Gaskell uses the parable to reject the idea of this obscurity: the talented woman must not 'shrink' nor 'hide'. The word 'napkin', a piece of domestic equipment, again alludes to women's traditional place in the home. It is also an item used to protect from soiling, or allows cleansing. In rejecting the use of the napkin, Gaskell gently releases the female novelist from domestic duties and denies that a woman who exposes herself to the public needs cleansing or protection.

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Gaskell's solution to the dilemma of celebrating the achievements of both woman and novelist is a surprising one: it is to create the paradoxical figure of the famous unknown.

Gaskell, who quotes Charlotte Brontë's own assertion that 'the most profound obscurity is infinitely preferable to vulgar notoriety',¹⁴³ works hard to transmute Brontë's fame into something more acceptable. *Lives of Great Men* frequently used a narrative structure that traced their subject's rise from obscurity to fame. Gaskell could have used such a structure, as Brontë was thrown into the limelight as a best-selling author following a secluded life. Instead, she chooses a more circular structure that maintains a simultaneous sense of Brontë's obscurity and fame. One common, though questionable, assertion is that whereas male autobiography tends to be unified, linear, preoccupied with the public and insistently focused on the writing subject, female autobiography favours the disjointed, the circular, the domestic and the collective.¹⁴⁴ Here, the pattern is replicated in Gaskell's effort to distance Brontë from a masculine narrative of achievement.

Gaskell is intrigued by the fine line between female obscurity and fame from the first pages of the biography, where the epigraph taken from *Aurora Leigh* laments 'How dreary 'tis for women to sit still / On winter nights by solitary fires / And hear the nations praising them far off' (I, title page). Gaskell repeatedly portrays Brontë, modest and retiring, as both famous and unknown ('the whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author', II, 37; 'one and all are full of praise of this great, unknown genius', II, 38). She talks of the 'unknown author of 'Shirley'' (II, 117), which, by the publication of that 1849 novel, Brontë no longer was. A visit to London during which she is celebrated is followed by her resumption of 'her noiseless daily duties' (II, 137). During Brontë's lifetime, this retreat only further stoked the fire of public curiosity, and the anonymous author of *Jane Eyre* became famous, paradoxically, for being unknown. Within the biography itself,

¹⁴³ Charlotte Brontë to unnamed correspondent, 3 May 1848, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, II, 45.

¹⁴⁴ See Shari Benstock (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writing* (London, 1998); Estelle Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present Day* (Boston, 1986).

however, the description appears as a surprising attempt to satisfy both the status of the author and the demureness of the woman.

This depiction prompted some surprising responses. One anonymous reviewer asserted that “‘the short and simple annals of the poor” apply to the uneventful history of this great artist’s exoteric existence’.¹⁴⁵ The quotation from Gray here seems entirely inappropriate to describe Brontë’s achievements and the public recognition she gained. Yet the reviewer was correct in sensing that the contrast between Great Lives and ‘obscure lives’ did not hold for biographies of Victorian women. This aspect of the work clearly resonated with female readers. Anna Jameson found in the biography the depiction of a ‘boundless sphere of feeling and intellect crammed into a silent existence’,¹⁴⁶ despite the fact that silence seems a strikingly inapt term for the voice behind *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*. Similarly, Oliphant experienced the biography as a ‘plea for every woman dropped out of sight’.¹⁴⁷ That such a conclusion could be drawn from the biography of one of the most famous women of the nineteenth century is a testimony to Gaskell’s dual portrayal. This pattern was used in other biographies of women writers. Anne Gilchrist, in her biography of Mary Lamb, states that ‘on the whole Mary was a silent woman’ near the end of a work devoted to demonstrating the extraordinary vividness of its subject’s voice.¹⁴⁸ Women could also define themselves in this paradoxical manner. Oliphant describes herself in her autobiography as ‘very small, very obscure’:¹⁴⁹ curious labels for a popular writer and the favourite novelist of Queen Victoria.

Similarly, Gaskell succeeded in making Brontë’s life seem both highly dramatic (as would suit a Great Life) and uneventful (as befits a woman). Some critics were dubious that

¹⁴⁵ [Unsigned review], *Observer* (April 12, 1857), p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Joanne Shattock, ‘The Construction of the Woman Writer’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (2001), p. 19.

¹⁴⁷ Oliphant, ‘The Sisters Brontë’, p. 24.

¹⁴⁸ Anne Gilchrist, *Mary Lamb* (London: W. H. Allen, 1883), p. 293.

¹⁴⁹ Margaret Oliphant, *Autobiography*, in *Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill (Leicester, 1974), p. 8.

any material of interest could be found in Brontë's life, as 'the lives of women, and especially of Englishwomen, are marked by little that can excite the attention of those who have never seen them in the domestic world which has been their only sphere of action'.¹⁵⁰ Others were taken aback by the intensity of the narrative. George Henry Lewes felt that 'fiction has nothing more wild, touching and heart-strengthening to place above it',¹⁵¹ and a writer in the *National Magazine* called the work, evocatively, 'a strange poem-picture'.¹⁵² The two strands are united by a reviewer in *The Spectator*, who finds that 'the actual poverty of incident that characterizes the life' coexists with 'the profound pathos, the tragic interest' stimulated by the work.¹⁵³ The reviews all point to an absence, a lack, yet they agree that Gaskell has succeeded in creating something out of nothing.

If Gaskell, according to Oliphant, was 'bewildered' when creating her biography, so were the reviewers in responding to it. The rapid succession of descriptive terms and genres used to describe the work attests to this uncertainty. Poetry, the visual arts, the novel, and drama are all evoked – biography is a second, curious, absence. The attempt to explain Gaskell's work through fictional terms denotes that debates concerning the existence of a clear demarcation between fact and fiction had only recently begun, at least as regards biography. It also reveals that obscure and quiet lives had been deemed to belong to fictional forms. There is a sense of surprise upon discovering the flexibility of the biographical genre. James Fitzjames Stephen, Leslie Stephen's brother, also read the biography. He found it 'like a novel, and the skilful arrangement of lights and shades and colours – the prominence of some objects and the evident suppression of others – leave on the mind the excitement of a highly-wrought drama'.¹⁵⁴ Stephen brings both strands together: the biographer's dual interest

¹⁵⁰ [Unsigned review], *SR* (April 4, 1857), p. 313.

¹⁵¹ George Henry Lewes to Elizabeth Gaskell, 15 April 1857, repr. *The George Eliot Letters*, vol. II, p. 315

¹⁵² [Unsigned review], *NM*, 2 (June 1857), pp. 76-8

¹⁵³ [Unsigned review], *The Spectator*, 30 (Supplement, 4 April 1857), pp. 373-4

¹⁵⁴ [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'The License of Modern Novelists', *ER*, 106 (July 1857), p. 155

in revealing and obscuring ('lights and shades', 'prominence' and 'suppression'), and the sense that such depictions of womanhood were usually to be found in fiction. Reviewers seemed surprised by their own emotional response to the work, as if an intense and almost physical response was not generally associated with the biographical genre. In fact, the ability to stimulate the reader's emotion became an essential part of biographers' justification for drawing attention to 'obscure' lives, and is a thread that runs throughout many of these works, whether devoted to men or women.

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Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was undoubtedly innovative, from the unprecedented complexity of its portrait of a woman's life to its manipulation of biographical conventions. It is difficult, however, to determine precisely how far the work served as an inspiration for later biographies of women in general, and of women *by* women in particular. Despite its evident appeal, the work could not be held up as an unproblematic model for biographers of female subjects. Reviewers applauded the representation of a self-effacing, noble woman, but repeatedly denounced the indiscretions committed by the biographer (regarding, in particular, Branwell's amorous intrigues) and controversy clung to the work. The *Life* provided a difficult model for a second, more practical, reason: the extraordinary nature of the subject – Brontë's life, genius, and surroundings – presented Gaskell with opportunities for a striking biographical portrayal that few biographers could hope for.

Nevertheless, following the success of the work, biographies of women (and by women) were increasingly published, and it is likely that Gaskell's work acted as a release. Biographers rarely drew attention to this influence.¹⁵⁵ It was the image of Brontë and the female writer that prompted insistent allusions rather than biography as a genre: biographers

¹⁵⁵ One female autobiographer who did closely follow the model was Mary Cholmondeley. See Linda Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography* (London, 1999), pp. 173-98.

repeatedly compared their subjects with Gaskell's version of Charlotte Brontë (as in Austen-Leigh's memoir of Jane Austen), but Gaskell was rarely directly named. Gaskell had not been the first biographer of a woman to dwell insistently on domestic matters and to value the moral worth of her subject above her contribution to literature. The sophistication with which she did this, however, helped to raise later biographies above the level of simplistic exemplary tales. Biographies of women continued to demonstrate a strong preoccupation with the domestic, but it is difficult to determine whether this was out of a conscious choice to follow a powerful literary model, or because the limited choices available to women simply dictated that this should be the principal focus.

The model of the female writer provided by Elizabeth Gaskell does not account for the variety of women's lives that followed the publication of her life of Brontë. George Eliot, for example, was the subject of three strikingly different biographies: one by a female writer, Mathilde Blind, which denies that a woman cannot take a rightful place in a traditionally masculine tradition (1883);¹⁵⁶ a domestic biography published in 1885 by Eliot's husband, J. W. Cross, which insists that 'the joys of the hearthside, the delight in the love of her friends, were the supreme pleasures in her life'.¹⁵⁷ Finally, Leslie Stephen's *George Eliot* (1902), a volume of the (inappropriately named) 'English Men of Letters' series, was aimed at literary students. Eliot's works there are the focus of serious discussion, though her gender is the subject of wry comments about how women prefer to be enslaved or lack a sense of humour.¹⁵⁸ The three works, which have been discussed in more depth elsewhere,¹⁵⁹ show that there was no simple evolution in the biographical representation of women from censured portraits to more complex ones, but instead an ongoing debate on female representation. What

¹⁵⁶ Mathilde Blind, *George Eliot* (London: W. H. Allen, 1883).

¹⁵⁷ J. W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life, as related in her letters and journals, arranged and edited by her husband J. W. Cross* (London: Blackwood, 1885), vol. I, p. vi.

¹⁵⁸ Leslie Stephen, *George Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1902), pp. 97 and 198.

¹⁵⁹ See Shattock, 'The Construction of the Woman Writer' (2001) and Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form*, esp. chapter 3, 'Versions of the Life: George Eliot and her Biographers'.

binds these works, however, is that, whilst biographies of men do not routinely submit notions of masculinity to scrutiny and measure their subject against accepted gender ideals, biographies of women maintain the analysis of gender as a central component of their subject's representation.

Above anything else, Gaskell's work demonstrated that a biography concerned with more domestic, apparently feminine concerns could be as powerful and worthwhile as any public life of a Great Man. Gaskell's influence does seem present, however, in the numerous biographies that depict women as divided between public and private loyalties, and in those works that intermingle fame and obscurity as qualities that, rather than being opposites, can in fact be reconciled.

Biographies of Minor Women Writers

As Joanne Shattock states, 'comparatively few women writers were memorialized by full-scale biographies'.¹⁶⁰ Many successful women of letters turned their pens instead to collective female biographies - Anna Jameson, Julia Kavanagh and Charlotte Yonge are some notable examples. The form, which has attracted increasing recent attention, could be moulded in interesting ways. The biographers expressed their sense of participating in a crucial process of re-evaluation and female canonisation. When Mrs. Elwood wrote her *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England*, in 1843, she denied awareness 'of there being any published Biography of Literary Females of the past and present century'.¹⁶¹ Many neglected female writers were reintroduced to the public through such means.

Yet a small number of full-length biographies – barely more than a dozen - of minor female writers were written and published for public circulation. (To include those intended

¹⁶⁰ Shattock, 'The Construction of the Woman Writer', p. 10.

¹⁶¹ Mrs. Elwood, *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England, from the commencement of the last century* (London: Henry Colburn, 1843), vol. I, p. v.

for private circulation would dramatically increase numbers.) These included lives of Mary Sewell, a Quaker who penned didactic tales and whose invalid daughter wrote the famous *Black Beauty*; Susan Ferrier, a Scottish novelist and friend of Sir Walter Scott who abandoned her writing upon converting to strict evangelicalism, or of Caroline Leakey, poet and novelist who travelled to Van Diemen's Land with her sister, wrote a female convict novel, and later set up a home in England for fallen women. Their biographers were principally, though not exclusively, female. Wariness regarding the female writer was by no means restricted to men, nor did all men condemn female literary activities. The differences between biographies written by men and those penned by women are not striking; however, it seems that the more complex portraits were often those offered by female biographers. The works appeared later in the nineteenth century, partly due simply to the gradual increase of women writers during the period.

Two works stand out amongst this group of works. Annie Keary (1825-1879) was a novelist raised in Yorkshire and Clifton, near Bristol. She was troubled from early life with domestic burdens and, having never married, devoted herself to her family, despite serious health problems and bouts of depression. Despite this, she wrote children's stories and domestic novels that reached a degree of popularity. Her life was written by her sister Eliza (named only as 'her sister' on the title page), who achieved a more modest success as a poet and children's writer. The biography, published in 1882 by Macmillan (for whom Annie frequently wrote), suggests parallels with *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* in both its style and content.¹⁶² At least two reviewers felt the similarities, and critics were pleased with the 'rare charm' and 'strange pathos' displayed.¹⁶³ Indeed, Eliza and Annie, like the Brontës, were the daughters of an Irish-born clergyman who settled in Yorkshire. The sisters built detailed imaginary worlds during their lonely and secluded childhood. Like Charlotte, Annie was

¹⁶² [Eliza Keary], *Memoir of Annie Keary* (London: Macmillan, 1882).

¹⁶³ [Unsigned review], *Athenaeum*, 2873 (November 18, 1882), p. 654.

frequently forced to put aside her writing to take care of her family, and her nieces and nephews in particular, whose parents were in India. The sisters were very close, and during a period founded and ran a home for unemployed servants in London together. The work describes with the most vigour the idea of the divided female writer and her double life.

Frances Trollope (1779-1863), a more formidable figure, cannot be so easily labelled 'minor'. Though now principally remembered as Anthony Trollope's mother, she achieved some significant success as the author of thirty-five novels and many other non-fiction publications. She was not afraid of courting controversy, through depictions of 'unwomanly' female heroines and vigorous attacks on social problems from slavery to industrialism. Her life was marked by domestic difficulties both financial and emotional, as she lost two children and her marriage was unhappy. Her daughter-in-law and biographer Frances Eleanor Trollope anticipated the decline of her reputation, and depicts her as drifting into oblivion: 'fashions change; reputations fade; books are forgotten' is the biographer's rather laconic comment.¹⁶⁴ The work is of interest as it appears atypical, from the hefty two volumes, published by Richard Bentley, that usually commemorated masculine endeavours, to its frank and unapologetic tone. Yet, in its robust depiction of female literary productivity, it is representative of many biographies in this group.

Both of these are domestic biographies, as their authors were related by blood or marriage to the subject. Though domestic biographies are usually best considered separately, this principle needs to be mitigated here. This is in part because most biographies of women were domestic biographies (and more so for biographies of female writers than for nuns or missionaries), but also because these works, and those of Keary and Trollope in particular, are closer in form and content to non-domestic works. Keary, for example, considerably

¹⁶⁴ Frances Eleanor Trollope, *Frances Trollope: Her Life and Literary Work from George III to Victoria* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1895), vol. I, p. 1.

downplays her own presence in the work, as if to distance herself from the model of domestic biography, whilst Trollope's work stands out by its authoritative physical appearance.

The two works, together with this group of biographies as a whole, enrich an understanding of the representation of female writers in the period, but also challenge assumptions made about the limited nature of female biography. Keary's biography illustrates the biographical treatment of women who were often compelled to abandon literary ambitions to fulfil domestic obligations; the other represents those biographies that depict women taking up literature for precisely the same reason. The group as a whole is concerned with finding an adequate balance between individual and communal duties. The lingering assumption in these works is that women can combine the two, yet this reconciliatory image nevertheless leaves space for sometimes striking accounts of ambition and suffering. To some extent, the relative shade shielding these figures enables the contemplation of ideas which would be more problematic in a subject who had lived in the spotlight and who suggested more unnerving ideas of female desires.

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A cursory glance at these lives reveals much drama and originality, yet the biographers almost unanimously describe their lives as uneventful: 'her life was a very quiet one, almost uneventful', 'a life so quiet and uneventful', 'I questioned if a life so quiet and uneventful could furnish sufficient material', a 'comparatively uneventful' story, a 'life as uneventful as any woman's could be'.¹⁶⁵ As with *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, these reassuring descriptions mask a more complex reality. The almost identical words used by the biographers suggest that the phrase had become a convention that gave permission for the life

¹⁶⁵ Keary, *Memoir of Annie Keary*, p. 1; John A. Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782-1854* (London: John Murray, 1898), p. 7; Mrs. Bayly, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Sewell* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1889), p. v; Beatrice Marshall, *Emma Marshall: a Biographical Sketch* (London: Seeley & Co., 1900), p. iv; Mrs. Morgan John O'Connell, *Glimpses of a Hidden Life: Memories of Attie O'Brien* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1887), p. 1.

to be displayed. It is surely significant that this convention is more rarely used for the lives of religious poets and writers, whose unworldly concerns were more clearly advertised.

The biographers simultaneously celebrate and downplay the women's achievements. There is far greater discussion of the subject's literary endeavours here than in many biographies of greater and more recognized women of letters. The price for this is the emphasis upon the amateurism of the writers. The biographers unabashedly label their subject's verses as 'unpretending', or mockingly describe the writers as part of the 'scrawling sisterhood'.¹⁶⁶ Frances Trollope's biographer readily grants that there are 'novelists of incomparably higher genius' than her subject, whose works can be classed amongst 'the lighter literature of this century' (I, 1). Female literary attempts often appeared more acceptable under such a label, and numerous women published journals, letters and diaries on the grounds that they were similarly unpretending scribbles.¹⁶⁷ Amateurism is, not unexpectedly, a common feature in biographies of obscure or minor subjects, as it is one explanation for the subjects never having attained fame.

Yet the women tread the thin line between amateurism and professionalism. Mary Jean Corbett argues that, as a reaction to the growing part that women were playing in the literary trade, men of letters developed the notion of literature as a (male) profession, supported by literary institutions that excluded women.¹⁶⁸ The dismissive attitude towards their works excludes the subjects from this privileged circle, yet the biographers discuss the subjects' activities in terms of their practical value. A recurrent pattern is that of women who, like Trollope, took up literary work following their husband's professional failures. The nature of these women's undertakings, in one biography, is even directly contrasted with

¹⁶⁶ Bayly, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Sewell*, p. 137; O'Connell, *Glimpses of a Hidden Life*, p. 101.

¹⁶⁷ See Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 42.

¹⁶⁸ Mary Jean Corbett, *Representing Femininity: Middle-class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiography* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 61-3.

artistic activity, as one writer's 'pen was too busy till the last in fulfilling its strenuous engagements to allow her to indulge in any such literary recreation as writing reminiscences'.¹⁶⁹ The phrase implicitly defines the writer's activity as a masculine one: 'strenuous', in opposition to the feminine 'recreation'. Yet here, there is no suggestion in the passage that the writer is to be reproached for taking up this masculine role; the fact that writing is expressed in masculine rather than feminine terms, however, remains. Oddly, autobiographical writing is also associated with light and trivial literature, perhaps in contrast not only with novels but also with the robustness of biography.

There is a readiness in many of these works to discuss the financial gain of literature that is absent in many biographies of both great men and women. This is most clearly expressed in Trollope's biography: 'The motive which instigated her to attempt authorship, was, undoubtedly, the desire to add to the slender resources of the family' (I, 115). Money concerns dominate the biography, from the subject's attempts to pay off debt to being able to provide a final trip for her dying son. Following the death of Trollope's husband, the biographer comments:

His wife had for some time been the sole bread-winner of the family. As his widow she still had a strong stimulus to exertion, in the desire to improve the position and prospects of her sons, and to provide for her daughters (I, 252).

As with the description of one writer's 'strenuous engagements', Trollope is depicted in terms not far removed from masculine labour. When Anthony Trollope, in his *Autobiography* (1883), had dwelt on the pecuniary motives behind his writing, the reaction had been distaste for a revelation that seemed to debase the idea of inspired literary creation. Certainly, the biographer previously stated that 'a vast number of good books *have* been written for money' (I, 115). The choice of the word 'good', however, rather than 'great', keeps Trollope's productions firmly in the category of literature unlikely to endure. The very professionalism

¹⁶⁹ Marshall, *Emma Marshall*, p. 61.

claimed by these women (or claimed for these women by their biographers) prohibits their access to a nobler literary sphere.

Instead, their work, as in Gaskell's depiction through the parable of the talents of Charlotte Brontë's work, is reconfigured as yet another feminine duty to care and provide for her family. Linda Peterson writes of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's autobiography that the latter perceived her literary endeavours as 'an extension of domestic labour',¹⁷⁰ and this is a common feature of female autobiography. Where Tonna was coy about the pecuniary benefits of her work, however, the biographers of these subjects are not. The depiction of such industrious women downplays the role that inspiration and literary ambition may have had in their writing lives.

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It was not only the idea of women's participation in the public sphere that created anxiety but also the possibility that women indulge in their imagination to an excessive degree. The effects of literary creation on the female mind were often debated in the pages of journals and collective biographies. George Lillie Craik asserted that woman usually 'gained by her study and scholarship an increase both of happiness and usefulness'. In the collective biography *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways* (1892), Catherine Hamilton insisted that 'it is not amongst writers that the happiest women are generally found' but amongst those who 'require nothing but the calm recurrence of those peaceful home duties'.¹⁷¹ The biographies reflect this nervousness. Those biographies that allow a greater role for the woman writer's imaginative life – which overwhelmingly concern women who did not write for money – were faced with the difficult task of explaining private feelings and longings.

¹⁷⁰ Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography*, p. 49.

¹⁷¹ George Lillie Craik, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties, illustrated by Female Examples* (London: C. Cox, 1847), p. 357; Catherine Hamilton, *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways* (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden and Co., 1892), p. v.

The insistence on the 'quiet' and 'uneventful' lives of these writers dispels any possibility that they might have any affinity with the tumultuous life of Byron, the tortured existence of John Clare, or even the controversial choices of George Eliot. Their writing habits are resolutely distanced from representations of Romantic male creativity, and above all the autobiographical impulses that had become associated with morbid introspection. For a woman to be overly concerned with self was profoundly troubling, as it threatened her supposed role as companion and nurturer. Annie Keary's biography most vividly illustrates this fear. The biographer finds the seeds of the future writer in the imaginative life of the subject as a child, and insists that her

inventions and dreaming were always entirely impersonal; she never by any chance, I think, built a castle in the air about herself or her own future, as many young people are in the habit of doing; all thoughts of self were crowded out by an absorbing realisation of her own creations. It was with her, she used to say, as if she were watching the progress of one interminable tale, in which her own being bore no part, and over which her own will exercised no control; she just stood apart, and watched perpetually, like some Lady of Shalott, the passing and repassing of sweet shades, listening to their converse, waiting upon their actions, grieving at their sorrows, rejoicing in their joy (40).

The passage avoids images of the writer carefully working on her writings and diminishes the importance of the creative being. Strikingly, the posture assumed by the subject is a traditionally feminine one: 'listening', 'waiting on', 'grieving' and 'rejoicing'. This strong imagination does not threaten her womanly role, but instead confirms her status as the ideal helpmeet. The stress on impersonality distances potential accusations of Romantic self-absorption.¹⁷² The depiction is, however, disturbing: there is the possibility of *Bovary*-esque absorption in such 'dreamings', and more than a hint of danger in the Tennysonian reference. Earlier, the biographer had defined her nature as 'unworldly' (2). Later, we are told that 'it never seemed to her as if she invented characters', and that the characters existed 'independently of her control' (85). The depiction echoes Gaskell's description of Charlotte

¹⁷² See also Bayly, *Life and Letters of Mrs. Sewell*, p. 142.

Brontë, who would wake ‘and the progress of her tale lay clear and bright before her’ as a kind of “possession” (as it were).¹⁷³ In both cases, the female ideal of passivity comes dangerously close to schizophrenia in the biographer’s struggle to distance the writer from a self-willed act of literary creation.

It is in the biography of a religious poet, Emma Tatham, that the most unembarrassed depiction of literary creation occurs. This is partly because the subject is a poet whereas the others are predominantly novelists but principally because the omnipresent religious concerns dispel suggestions that the poet was motivated by worldly ambition. Here, Emma Tatham is unabashedly described as a ‘young genius’, who composes a ‘lofty storm-song’ when ‘incapable of rest from intense enjoyment and irrepressible inspiration’.¹⁷⁴ The biography of an Irish Catholic writer, Attie O’Brien, similarly makes allowance for her ‘fervid nature’, ‘vivid imagination’ and the ‘tumult of her heart’, though no claims are made for any lasting literary talent.¹⁷⁵ The biographers of secular writers stay clear of such statements.

For similar reasons, the biographies of religious writers offer the most vivid depictions of female depression. Emma Tatham sank into ‘darkness and the deeps’ (54), Attie O’Brien suffered nights of nervous unrest punctuated by ‘horrible dreams’ (127). In both cases, this suggests to the biographers a comparison with ‘great’, canonical writers. Emma’s biographer links her condition to the poetic temperament, ‘common to most young poets’, and forges a parallel with the temperaments of Byron and Shelley (49). Attie’s biographer compares and contrasts her subject’s life with that of George Eliot. Despite her bouts of depression, Attie is comforted by her faith, an attitude which is compared favourably against the ‘profound melancholy’ of Eliot (241). Though the comparison is with another female author, it is

¹⁷³ Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, II, p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ Benjamin Gregory, *Memoir of Emma Tatham* (London: Hamilton & Co., 1859), p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ O’Connell, *Glimpses of a Hidden Life*, pp. 4 and 20.

religion, rather than gender, that preoccupies the biographer. References to such figures are conspicuously absent from the biographies of secular writers.

Both religious and secular biographies, however, depict literary activities as a compensation for a narrow domestic sphere. The biography of Attie O'Brien most colourfully depicts the restrictions of the unmarried woman's life:

To work, to read – to read aloud for Grannie, - to give out the Rosary for the little household, to do some pious stitching – to wit, the scapulars, - to visit a few friends; such were the duties to which the girl was striving to tie down her hot, eager, passionate heart (20).

Paradoxically, given the association made by Attie's biographer between literary activities and mental unrest, literature is welcomed as a means of relieving an oppressive state of inactivity. 'Heaven, in its mercy, sent her the consolation of work; by slow degrees she felt her way to the pen, and then her life became delightfully full and interesting' (16). Literature is deemed inferior to marriage but vastly preferable to 'a life of dreary monotony without either pleasure, variety, or congenial occupation' (1). The biographer of Annie Keary also, though less boldly, depicts literature as a 'refuge' (84) from domestic worries. Anna Sewall's mother took to writing because of 'the emptiness of her life' (131) in her daughter's absence. In all these biographies, as in Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, female dissatisfaction is expressed within a framework that ignores the strains placed on women who sought or felt compelled to embody traditional female virtues.

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The attempt to reconcile personal longings and domestic duties once again leads to depictions of divided women. Though the biographers are more eager than Gaskell in discussing the women's financial gains, they are equally concerned with insisting upon their subject's moral worth. One 'was not extraordinarily gifted' but shone as a 'Christian lady'¹⁷⁶,

¹⁷⁶ J. V. Bishop, *She Walked with God, And Was Not, for God took her: Memorials of Mrs. Bass* (London: William Mack, 1882), p. vii.

another poet's 'heart and mind and fancy [were] very superior to anything she actually achieved with the pen'.¹⁷⁷ The dominant word used to describe Annie Keary is 'gentle'. Domestic and maternal concerns are shown to preoccupy the subjects beyond literary concerns. Trollope 'was essentially womanly, and although, from circumstances, she was in her day distinguished by a great deal of public notice, the really happy moments of her life were those passed in her home, amid home affections and home interests' (II, 100).

Yet the biographers are forced to account for the place of literary work in their subject's life. The biography of Annie Keary depicts the careful balance between writing and home duties in a very similar manner to Gaskell's work:

As long as any tale was upon the stocks, she lived in it, with a sort of double life, which kept her, as only imagination can keep people, from the narrowing effects of routine, or the roughening of little daily cares. Yet Annie never separated herself outwardly from any of these, nor grudged the time and thought that she was often called upon to give in carrying out housekeeping arrangements for her mother at times when the latter was laid aside and dependent upon a daughter's help (85-6).

Keary is even more direct than Gaskell in defining the woman writer's life as a 'double' one. Writing does not distract Keary from 'daily cares', but simply preserves her from their unwanted effects. The biographer seems to deny the division implicit in 'double' (Annie 'never separated'), yet the word 'outwardly' reinforces it. It is clear that Keary's desires and true self lie in her imagination, where she is called by her name, 'Annie', and not in the domestic circle, where she is a more generic 'daughter'. As with Gaskell, one has to look beneath the surface for suggestions that the domestic ideal can be questioned.

The division of duties between home and literary work did not, however, have to be experienced as a personal struggle. Many of these accounts celebrate woman's ability to combine, and achieve some success in, both domains. Balance and harmony are stressed beyond any other concerns. Rather than taking the woman novelist out of the home, the

¹⁷⁷ O'Connell, *Memoirs of Attie O'Brien*, p. 6. See also Edward Heneage Dering, *Memoirs of Georgiana, Lady Chatterton* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1878), pp. 304-5.

biographies reconfigure the domestic space as one in which individual and collective activities can be carried out together. Long before Virginia Woolf campaigned for a woman's right to 'a room of her own', these biographies deny the need for an isolated space. 'No special room in the house was appropriated for her writing. Generally she wrote at the dining-room table, clearing up her papers when it was laid for meals', writes one biographer.¹⁷⁸ This is a common refrain. Keary

made no claim or provision for conditions such as would have enabled her to write more easily, but might have caused inconveniences to the household, never so much as the taking of a room for herself even, or the demanding of hours of silence anywhere. [...] On the contrary, she used to settle herself to work in the midst of all sorts of difficulties, at the mother's bedside often, writing there during intervals of talk: or she would take her place with her MS. before her at the common table, where every one else was reading or working, or even talking, as the case might be. All this shows the happy side of her work [...] (86-7).

The biographer's final commentary provides a slightly too glib impression of jollity following a description that acknowledges the challenging nature of the arrangement even as it is implicitly approved.

Female autobiographies also addressed this issue. Margaret Oliphant depicted her writing space as

the little second drawing-room where all the (feminine) life of the house goes on; and I don't think I have ever had two hours undisturbed (except at night, when everybody is in bed) during my whole literary life. Miss Austen, I believe, wrote in the same way [...].¹⁷⁹

As throughout her autobiography, Oliphant celebrates the close union of the domestic and the literary in her life even as she laments it as the cause of what she deems her comparative mediocrity. The allusion to Jane Austen suggests a desire to create a feminine tradition celebrating female ingenuity even as it deplores the conditions that makes it necessary. Oliphant, Linda Peterson argues, was weary of the younger generation of feminists who laid

¹⁷⁸ Marshall, *Beatrice Marshall*, p. 290.

¹⁷⁹ Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 24.

‘claim to the “professional” by excluding or separating it from the “domestic”’.¹⁸⁰ The biographies can be read in a similar light.

Feminist critics have been keen to interpret representations of ‘doubleness’ in women’s lives as a sign of constraint and repression on the part of both biographer and subject, yet this is not necessarily so. These biographies argue that, instead of the domestic sphere breaking into public life, it can be reshaped to make space for individual, imaginative activities. The subjects are women who, as one biographer describes, can both converse with the most illustrious individuals of the period and cook delicious bread. In one passage, Frances Trollope searches for a new home, considers expenses and locations carefully and, ‘in the midst of all these anxieties, occupations, and interruptions, her attention to her own work never relaxed’ (I, 195). The biography conveys an impression of incessant activity. Like her fellow writers, she is admired, not condemned, for her restless energy. The feminised space of the home is restructured to provide a space that reconciles both individual and communal needs.

The reconciliation of these duties is a central theme of biographies of obscure lives, whether male or female. Biography is used as a genre that has the unique ability to harmonise these two demands. As the narrative of an individual destiny, it celebrates the individual. As a third-person narrative that uses autobiographical writings but argues for the inadequacy (or undesirability) of extended introspection, it restores the importance of a perspective that goes beyond the self. Biographies of famous women attempted to achieve this balance, but faced a greater difficulty in accounting for the importance of the domestic sphere in the life of a woman with a successful public career. Biographies of lesser talents depicted their subjects as being largely successful in reconciling these competing demands, and we are encouraged to

¹⁸⁰ Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women’s Autobiography*, p. 153.

applaud them for that success. Such a stance is perhaps at least in part because the writer was deemed to have remained reassuringly obscure.

Within these biographies that advertise their subjects, the biographers do not ask the public to reconsider the subject's importance in the public sphere. Many of these biographies make an odd plea for the unimportance of their subjects in the public sphere, in contrast to the lives of neglected or mediocre male artists and writers.¹⁸¹ Whereas Oliphant suspected that her work suffered as a result of her domestic responsibilities, the biographers of minor writers see the subject's mediocrity as a reassuring sign of their balanced lives. The hidden status of the subjects is approved and even willed by the biographers. The biographers work hard to create an impression of 'quiet'. Turning points and events are downplayed in favour of repetitive episodes of daily life. Dates are often occluded, so that it is frequently difficult to give an account of the life beyond the overall impression it provides. The biographers also make it clear that the aim of the work is not to re-evaluate the subject's works and reputation: their critical neglect, they agree, was justified.

The works share a tendency to depict female frustration, anxiety, and exhaustion in terms more frank than dismissals of Victorian biography give allowance for. Many of them found a receptive audience and went into second and third editions. Yet the subjects are simultaneously released and trapped by their obscurity and mediocrity. Released, since it enabled biographers to present more relaxed and complex portrayals of their lives. Trapped, since, as with the characters of a novel, the biographer did not seek for them a life beyond the pages of the book, as their obscurity was often the condition for their temporary incursion into the public sphere. Biographers of nuns, who seemed to have rejected the public sphere altogether, faced very different issues.

¹⁸¹ See chapter 4.

Biographies of nuns

By far the largest group of biographies of women were religious biographies. Well over two hundred biographies published between 1830 and 1900 traced the spiritual lives of their subjects. Obscure lives perfectly suited these themes, advertised in titles such as *The Hidden Life* and *A Memorial of Humble Piety*. Of the more substantial biographies aimed at a wide public, most were written by either Catholics or Dissenters. That these were the two ends of the religious spectrum most subject to discrimination and attacks suggests that biography could be used to defend another kind of marginality.

Biographies of and by Dissenters is the largest, but least rewarding, group. An enduring motivation behind Dissenting biography was to provide an alternative to the distrusted genre of fiction. The biographies are often short and hagiographical; many were intended only for private circulation. They tend to be written in an abstract language that privileges religious patterns and typology, and are replete with biblical quotations illustrating the subject's behaviour. God, rather than the subject or her acquaintances, acts as the governing agent in the life. The voice of the subject is rarely conveyed, as the speech and diary entries or letters reproduced tend to be similar-sounding reflections on biblical texts. *The Pastor's Wife: a Memoir of Mrs. Sherman of Surrey Chapel* (1848), written by the subject's husband, James Sherman (who introduced Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in book form in 1852) was enormously popular and is representative of the better examples from this group. At the other end of the scale, Anna Shipton's 1863 sketch of Emily Gosse, the Plymouth Brethren member and mother of Edmund Gosse, far from the sophistication of Gosse's own *Father and Son* (1907), is an almost unreadable work in which the facts of the subject's life gradually disappear from the narrative as the biographer moves

into ever-more rapturous religious exclamations.¹⁸² The biographies are generally concerned with the oxymoronic ‘silent power’ and ‘unconscious influence’¹⁸³ of their female subjects, who never deviate from ideal womanly behaviour.

Catholics caused even greater cultural anxiety than Dissenters, and their biographies reflect this. The 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act went some way towards ending long-standing discriminations against Catholics, but suspicions endured and peaked during the 1830s Oxford movement, Cardinal Newman’s conversion to Catholicism in 1845 and the “No Popery” riots in 1850. Catholic nuns were the target of confused attacks: some opponents believed that women were being lured into convents against their will, whereas others reacted against the image of female self-sufficiency projected by the communities, which suggested contradictory images of sterility and dangerous sexuality. Nuns appeared to menace woman’s natural domestic role in providing an alternative to married life that many women found attractive. Many Catholics, such as Lady Georgiana Fullerton, countered such depictions with positive fictional portrayals, but biography also had an important role to play as a mode of defence.

Lives of nuns were published largely between 1870 and 1890, after Catholic paranoia had diminished and past threats could be contemplated. They form a coherent body of work that stands out from the quality of the writing, the significance of the publishers and the complexity of the portrayals. Most of the biographers, unlike with other categories of ‘obscure’ female lives, were seasoned writers. Three works are of particular interest. Augusta Drane’s 1869 biography of Mother Margaret Hallahan (1802-1868) is unusual both in being a biography of an English, rather than an Irish, nun, and in being written by a fellow nun. The work is striking for its vivid insider’s portrayal of convent life and it is undoubtedly the most

¹⁸² See D.C. nos. 8; 9; 21; 27; 39; 46; 47; 81; 82; 90; 160.

¹⁸³ Sherman, *The Pastor’s Wife: A Memoir of Mrs. Sherman of Surrey Chapel* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1848), p. 461.

highly readable of the group. Drane, who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1850, published translations, history, biography, poetry and fiction, and kept abreast of contemporary trends (she enjoyed reading George Eliot), whilst directing over a hundred sisters in four different convents. Sarah Atkinson's *Mary Aikenhead* (1879), a life of the foundress of the congregation of the Irish Sisters of Charity (1787-1858), uses biography to re-examine Irish history and identity, and is similar to the biography of Frances Trollope in the authoritative air it seeks to project. A life of the lesser-known nun Mary Xaveria Fallon (1832-1888) by the Irish poet and feminist Katharine Tynan (1891) explores the literary attractions of hidden lives.¹⁸⁴ The works exude authority: they are bulky, well-bound and well-printed, and have more in common with traditional biographies of Great Men than most works commemorating women. This assumed authority compensated for past neglect and repression, and this posture is in the image of their subjects, who often achieved great power and authority within an enclosed, extremely private space.

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Nuns posed a unique biographical challenge. They were trebly obscure: few achieved fame beyond their religious circle, their lives were shielded from the public gaze by convent walls and, even within active religious communities, private contemplation was the basis of their existence. William Hutch addresses the fact that nuns, however significant in their communities, were unlikely to be famous:

Who was Mrs. Ball? is a question which, in all probability, will at once present itself to most persons who glance at the title-page of this book; for the story of her life, like that of many another silent worker who has conferred substantial benefits on society, is known to few beyond the circle of those whom it more immediately concerns.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Augusta Drane, *Life of Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1869); Sarah Atkinson, *Mary Aikenhead: Her Life, Her Work and Her Friends* (London: Burns & Oates, 1879); Katharine Tynan, *A Nun: Her Friends and Her Order; Being A Sketch of the Life of Mother Mary Xaveria Fallon* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1891).

¹⁸⁵ William Hutch, *Mrs. Ball: Foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland and the British Colonies (There called Sisters of Loretto). A Biography* (London: James Duffy and Sons, 1879), p. xiii.

The depiction of the hidden influence of 'silent workers' on the nation echoes similar passages in both Carlyle and Eliot. Yet whilst the phrase suggests that important participants in the national history have not been paid their dues, many of their nuns willed their own silence with regards to the public sphere.

The biographers share the awareness that the core of their subject's life - private communion with God, or what Drane calls the 'hidden life' - is the most difficult to retrieve. In her life of Mary Xaveria Fallon, the Irish poet (and friend of W. B. Yeats) Katharine Tynan notes:

the life of a nun, unless she be a Catherine of Siena or a Teresa of Avila, is a level life [...]. Heights and depths of the hidden life are alike out of our view. We may see the outward graciousness, but the woman who chooses to be the Bride of Christ lives of necessity as far as heaven is beyond our eyes (1).

In the preface of *Middlemarch*, George Eliot used Saint Teresa to contrast the saint's 'passionate, ideal nature' and 'epic life' with the confused yearnings of women such as Dorothea Brooke.¹⁸⁶ Tynan's biography, written only a few years later in 1879, also uses Saint Teresa as a contrast to quieter, hidden female lives. This calm is savoured by the biographer rather than deplored, yet threatens the biographical project. Where Eliot could use fiction to bring a hidden life to light, the biographer is met with a more immediate form of obscurity: the true nature of the subject is 'out of our view', 'beyond our eyes'. Biography cannot function here as a form of public display.

The idea of poetry, as in much of Eliot's work, provides a means of solving this difficulty. Tynan quotes verses and entire poems throughout to convey her subject's convent:

Much of the poetry of the world seems to me to conserve itself in the convents. There is high ascetic poetry in the resigned wills, the cheerful abnegation, the patient service, the hardship to delicate bodies, which is a rule in all religious orders. For the eye and heart there is material poetry in the nun herself and her garb, and those beautiful dwelling-houses where

"The Brides of Christ

¹⁸⁶ Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1986), p. 3.

Lie hid, emparadised.” (3-4).

The association of poetry with Catholicism is bold, since a great fear of anti-Catholics was the religion’s dangerously seductive appeal. Tynan downplays this by drawing attention to the conservative nature of the convent and its role in the preservation of values and beauty. The biographer seeks to give a universal application to this poetry, by extending it to ‘much of the world’ and ‘all orders’. The poetry of convent life is closely tied to the poetry of hidden lives, as Tynan’s quote from Coventry Patmore’s *The Unknown Eros* (1877) demonstrates. This alliance enables biographers to make a double plea for readers to look beneath the surface of things.

Yet biography seems incongruous with convent life. The decision made by nuns to consecrate themselves to an ideal of service, humility and selflessness is difficult to reconcile with the individualism projected by both autobiography and biography. Aikenhead, for example, was ‘extremely averse from putting herself forward in any way’ (134). In Drane’s life of Mother Margaret Hallahan, this selflessness reaches almost pathological proportions:

The habit of her soul, which shrank from introspection and led her to rest on God as the one object of thought and affection, made any long or minute exercise of self-examination a kind of spiritual torture to her (59).

The nun carries to the extreme the Victorian suspicion of morbid introspection. Of course, most biographies of women stress the selflessness of their subjects. Here, however, abnegation of the self is carried further. To single out one nun for a biography is to further disrupt the communal nature of convent life. In this regard, the commonly expressed idea that female biographies stress the communal rather than the individual largely holds true.¹⁸⁷

The subjects, as a result, constantly threaten to evade the biographer. In order to describe her subject whilst conveying her selflessness Atkinson repeatedly portrays her

¹⁸⁷ See also p. 318. See Henry James Coleridge, *The Life of Mother Frances Mary Teresa Ball, Foundress in Ireland of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (London: Burns and Oates; Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1881) for a similar insistence on portraits of co-workers and nuns.

subject through the eyes of friends or bystanders. In her youth, Mary Aikenhead participated in neighbourhood dances, and

was an object of considerable interest to the older guests who were among the lookers-on. Those turbaned matrons, and those queued and powdered heads of families, made confidential comments to one another as they sipped their tea and tapped their silver snuff-boxes. They noticed how a natural vivacity and a certain youthful dignity were combined in her; they remarked her good-natured care of others, and the way in which she avoided ever becoming herself the centre of a circle (108).

Such passages enable the biographer to exhibit the subject from varying angles and reveal the biographer's reluctance to place the subject squarely at the centre of the biographical work. Atkinson frequently chips away at the centrality of the subject by giving a lengthy historical introduction, repeatedly moving away from Aikenhead to her acquaintances, or by turning from private to public events. Throughout the work, turning-points in the subject's life are not narrated through the subject's own words but through the intermediary of the biographer.

The rejection of individualism has many consequences for the biographer. True to the spirit of abnegation, very few nuns wrote, or at least preserved, autobiographical works. The biographer cannot count on the use of diaries, and the few surviving letters (principally concerned with administrative matters) rarely draw attention to the self. These constraints on the biographers mean that these works scarcely resemble the life-and-letters formula so frequently used during the Victorian period. The biographer's voice is both stronger and more analytical, with a closer resemblance to modern biographies. The greater share of commentary also means that the biographer must confront many of the ambiguities raised by each subject and cannot hide so easily behind large excerpts of autobiography. These challenges make for a more complex representation of female subjects.

Furthermore, since the biographers cannot rely upon introspective material, they turn instead to the works of their subjects. The result is that, paradoxically for lives of apparent contemplation, the emphasis is resolutely on action. Mother Margaret Hallahan, for example,

worked in her youth as a domestic servant, and once, brandishing a knife, threatened to kill a sexual predator. As foundress of the English Congregation of St. Catherine of Sienna, she interacted with some of the most important Catholics in England. Mother Ball designed a church. Mary Aikenhead was a formidable woman whose talents ranged from administration to architecture. Instead of focusing upon the private life commonly seen as the appropriate form for female auto/biography, the biographers are led to dwell upon the more public aspects of private lives. These biographies therefore appear, in the main, less contemplative than those of secular women.

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The departure to a convent appears simultaneously as an extreme example of the separate spheres doctrine and as its complete negation, through the rejection of the roles of wife and mother. The biographers vary in the extent to which they deem feminine roles to be affected by the subject's choice. Sarah Atkinson considers that

possibly Mary Aikenhead's friends, whether rich or poor, had no other ambition for her than that she should make a good marriage, be the mistress of a happy and an affluent home, the adored wife of a worthy man, and the mother of a troop of children, clever, handsome, and virtuous, like herself. [...] Her early conversion, her keen sense of the deliverance she had had from the bonds of error and the tyranny of a worldly spirit, and her gratitude for God's mercy had long ago disposed her for another career (109).

Atkinson's tone gently undermines the domestic ideal. The word 'adored' suggests a little too glibly the image of the angel in the house, and the 'troop' of children evokes a somewhat undesirable female productivity. The words 'deliverance' and 'career' claim the validity of different desires.

Margaret Hallahan was a more troubled individual, and her biography by her fellow nun Augusta Drane approaches the severance of worldly ties with a greater sense of its problematic nature but without questioning the subject's femininity. Hallahan's behaviour demonstrated

a detachment from creatures, the more remarkable when we remember her strong nature and ardent feelings. [...] Her early orphanhood, the rough treatment she had received in her youth, and the necessity imposed on her of acting for herself and making her way in spite of obstacles that would have daunted a weaker soul, had been among the providential causes which produced this result (252-4).

The biographer explains the rupture of worldly ties with a narrative more commonly found in male than female biography: the picaresque trajectory of the orphan overcoming obstacles and making his (or, here, her) way and a Smilesian tale of knowledge pursued under difficulties. The biographers rely less on conventions and stereotypes against which to measure their subject's behaviour than in biographies of writers, but judge the women on an individual basis.

Biographers were often nervous in describing the importance of a vocation in a woman's life that took her away from the domestic sphere, whether they moved in literary society or absorbed themselves in gruelling convent tasks. As with women writers, nuns are presented as divided beings, yet the biographers depict this division as a release. The striking contrast between the life before and after the taking of religious vows provides for each subject a pivotal moment. The biographers of these women share a tendency to describe this departure from one sphere of life to another as a death and rebirth. As Mary Aikenhead makes the transition, the biographer contemplates that

she now for the first time realised how great was the sacrifice she made in leaving for ever those who were so dear to her, and who had hitherto been so dependent on her care. Nor could she pronounce without emotion a final farewell to the troop of friends who had surrounded her in the old home; [...]. The great unknown future lay before her; and, bidding adieu to the pleasant city by the Lee, she took the first step on the untravelled way, with a brave heart though with tearful eyes, on Trinity Sunday, the 24th of May, in the year 1812 (136-7).

The taking of vows closely resembles a passage through death to the beyond ('the great unknown', 'the untravelled way', 'a final farewell'). Heather Henderson argues of conversion narratives in Victorian autobiography that 'metaphorically, conversion is a form of symbolic

death and rebirth',¹⁸⁸ and the same can be said of biography. Henry James Coleridge similarly states in his biography of Mrs. Ball that a 'life like this may be very pleasing, and even wonderful, in the eyes of the Angels, but its incidents are, to a great extent, hidden from mortal ken' (135-6). Again, there is a sense that the nun's life is not quite of a mortal nature, but takes place beyond death.

The lives of nuns provide a unique approach to the theme of the divided woman. The subjects do not move from private life to public life but disappear from the comparative worldliness of the home to the intense privacy of the convent. Home, unusually, is configured as a sphere of superficial worldly preoccupations, with dances and courting, whereas the convent combines an exclusively feminine sphere with the traditionally masculine world of work. On the one hand, the subjects lose the vivacity that they possess in the first half of their biographies. On the other hand, this carefully prepared division in the biographies enables the biographer to go on to scrutinise what remained a controversial vocation – that of a woman who has rejected a traditional domestic life – by placing it beyond a 'mortal' sphere.

Work (and, indeed, business) dominates these lives above all else, and forms a more significant part of the biographies than religion. Augusta Drane's depiction of Hallahan's convent life is typical:

Her notion of spirituality, and even of retirement, never excluded the idea of *labour*; and whilst desirous to train the younger members of her Community apart from the distractions of a worldly neighbourhood and an over-busy life, she always regarded *work* as one of the main instruments of spiritual formation (177).

The language of fulfilment through work closely echoes that reiterated in biographies of male entrepreneurs of the period. Sarah Atkinson similarly notes that Mrs. Aikenhead 'knew well that certain downright practical qualities were essential in a Sister of Charity: who should have a capacity for business, or at any rate a real love for work' (186).

¹⁸⁸ Heather Henderson, *The Victorian Self: Autobiography and Biblical Narrative* (London, 1989), p. 14.

The biographers allow the feminine to coexist with great strength of mind and body.

Atkinson notes that

women of a naturally robust and vivacious intellectual fibre, developed into a noble and beautiful type of character under a system of training which aimed most of all at the quickening of the spiritual life; and women, who had seemed in the world ungifted and unimportant, often surprised their old friends by the capacities they displayed as Sisters [...]. It was observed that the Sisters of Charity had the understanding of men, and were fit for any position in the world (186-7).

The religious life is presented as a harmonising influence, balancing male and female characteristics. The passage, and indeed the biography as a whole, suggests that the religious community offered women opportunities for the exertion of both mental and physical capacities that were sadly lacking elsewhere. The biographer plays with the idea of the hidden and the revealed and reverses preconceptions. 'The world' is the place where such lives are deemed 'unimportant' compared with the Great Lives commonly consecrated in biography. It is within the walls of the convent that the women develop from insignificant to important - the word 'displayed' recalls the transition from the hidden to the visible. The passage recalls the parable of the talents, also used by Elizabeth Gaskell. In a similar manner, the parable becomes a means of reconciling duty and desire.

The women also exhibit a variety of behaviour rarely found in other lives of women. The relative lack of male figures also means that the nun is freed from defining herself against the figure of a husband, which creates a less nervous portrayal of women. These are women who enjoy a good practical joke and cultivate strong female friendships. Maternal roles are replicated through relationships between spiritual mothers and her spiritual children. Humour has a larger place in these biographies than in most lives of women. Whilst Atkinson and Drane both emphasize the austerity of religious life, others stress its sensuality. When Mother Frances Teresa Ball takes her vows, Hutch's language becomes flamboyant:

Rich and rare exotics lay arranged around the altar, diffusing a perfume of exquisite, but delicate fragrance through the sanctuary. [...] The soft, low tones of the organ

peaked sweetly through the chapel, inviting her to the Espousals of the Lamb, while her heart and frame thrilled with an ecstasy of delight which baffles all description (71).

The common imagery of the nun as the bride of Christ is evoked in intense sensory language, reminiscent of Tennyson's 'St. Agnes' Eve'. The female subject is allowed to feel extreme emotions that would have appeared dubious in a secular biography. Safely separated from common worldly life by an act of death and rebirth, and physically separated by convent walls, the subject becomes free to experience the satisfaction of work, maternal delights and even sensuality.

A further reason for this unusually relaxed portrayal lies in the fact that the celebration of these female lives is closely tied to a broader project of religious and national reclamation. The biographers condemn the persecutions suffered by Catholics and stress the delights of their religion. William Hutch employs a militant tone as he recalls the 'more intolerable enactments of the Penal Code' and those 'not very remote days' when cathedral bells 'pealed but seldom, and then with sad and muffled tones, as if they feared to discover their existence' (5). The publication of Catholic biographies in itself protests against this past voicelessness, just as the lives of nuns need no longer be 'muffled'. Hutch aggressively contrasts 'repulsive' Protestant worship with the 'grand old ceremonial of the Catholic Church' (178). These biographies are written in part for a Catholic audience, but are also used as a platform from which to defend Catholicism to non-Catholics.

The confrontational tone increases when the biographers take on the subject of nationhood. Many of these works are concerned with *Irish* nuns and celebrate Irishness whilst condemnation of England's dealings with Ireland. Sarah Atkinson's biography of Mary Aikenhead opens with seventy pages on Ireland's Penal Days and a bleak portrayal of English domination and repression, as 'the Erie of the Gales became the Ireland of the English; a heritage of woe was all that remained to her; nought survived for national pride to feed on,

save memories bitter-sweet, and some few cherished names' (2). For many of these biographers, these subjects are Irish before they are women. Atkinson's vision of history brings a patriotic twist to Carlylean language:

The real interest lies where the chronicler hardly seeks for it: in the private story, so to speak, of the native population which resisted, and successfully, all the efforts that were made to exterminate it out of the land, or to crush it into an indistinguishable characterless mass (5).

The biographer explicitly aligns the narration of a woman's life with contemporary historiographical developments. The biography is a celebration of the neglected: of the ill-treated nation, of the private over the public and of women. Atkinson concludes her introduction with a lengthy account of women's place in Irish history and society that seems unconnected with the following account of Mary Aikenhead unless both narratives are considered as part of the same enterprise of recovery. It was unusual for biographies of women to be intermingled so closely such a militant project. What is most striking is that these hidden female lives seem to act as a metaphor for the nation. There is a sense that these autonomous, strong and productive female communities project an image of the Ireland the biographers wish to see develop. As such, these works fit into a broader contemporary discourse that advanced that the health of a nation was reflected in the lives of its 'obscure' men or, here, women more than its visible luminaries.

Biographers of female writers worked to reinterpret the public sphere as an acceptable space for female endeavour; biographers of nuns stressed the paradoxically liberating nature of the private enclosure. Biographies of female missionaries represented their subjects in a kind of limbo, as they evolve and define themselves in contrast to both British and foreign representations of accepted female behaviour.

Biographies of female missionaries

The increasing role played by women within missionary societies during the latter half of the nineteenth century is reflected by the gradual increase of biographies celebrating their lives. Women had accompanied their husbands, or, more rarely, their brothers, abroad at least since the early nineteenth century, but it was not until the 1860s that the principal societies, the London Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society, began to engage women, single or married, in significant numbers as missionaries in their own right, and hundreds of women were sent abroad each year, despite growing suggestions that missionaries, male or female, actually achieved very little in the way of conversions.

As with nuns, the propriety of deserting the domestic sphere was often questioned. It was common to believe that 'as the house is pre-eminently woman's kingdom, woman's world, so her first Home Mission-field is home.'¹⁸⁹ It had been increasingly accepted throughout the century that women might usefully be employed beyond their homes to carry out philanthropic labours such as visiting the sick. Foreign missionaries were far more problematic. As Deborah Kirkwood argues, missionary work 'began to appear as a real possibility to young women wishing to move out of the limited domestic sphere into more interesting employment which might involve travel and excitement, as well as religious fulfilment.'¹⁹⁰ Biographers taking on such women as subjects struggled to account for the unconventional nature of their lives.

Female missionary biographies initially commemorated the American women who pioneered these activities, closely followed by women accompanying their husbands.¹⁹¹ Collective biographies of missionaries were also a common repository for missionary lives.

¹⁸⁹ John Macpherson, *Isabella Macpherson* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1890), pp. 113-5.

¹⁹⁰ Deborah Kirkwood, 'Protestant Missionary Women: Wives and Spinsters', in *Women and Missions: Past and Present*, ed. Fiona Bowie (Oxford, 1993), p. 32

¹⁹¹ See D.C. nos. 19; 98; 109; 116.

The more interesting biographies of missionary women began to appear later in the century. Whereas lives of writers principally concerned English women, and lives of nuns Irish ones, these were mostly Scottish works, due mostly to the vigour of missionary enterprises there. Many appeared through publishing houses such as James Nisbet that focused heavily on producing biographies of local or unknown worthies, which reflected the fact that, though some missionaries achieved a certain celebrity status, these women 'for the most part laboured in obscurity, suffered in obscurity, and died in obscurity'.¹⁹² At least two dozen works are sufficiently substantial and complex to merit attention, and a handful explore the tensions surrounding the representation of such subjects with particular interest.

One biography, however, stands out. Agnes Giberne's *A Lady of England: The Life and Letters of Charlotte Maria Tucker* (1895) was published by the established house of Hodder and Stoughton, who presented many such lives in the 1890s in editions whose handsome bindings and rich illustrations reflected the improved status of female missionaries as subjects.¹⁹³ It claims the additional interest of being, like Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the commemoration of a professional female writer by another, as both wrote successful children's books, though Tucker's didactic fiction had largely been forgotten by the time Giberne took her up as a subject. Tucker (1821-1893) is in many ways an unusual and atypical subject. Suddenly freed from domestic ties, she left England at the age of fifty-four to begin a new career as a missionary in India. Giberne spends little time on Tucker's initial career concentrates instead on her subject's lesser-known life as a missionary in a manner that paints the forsaking of the domestic sphere as a liberation.

These works as a group explore the contentious figure of the female missionary, whose strong temperament and unconventional experiences are constantly mediated and

¹⁹² Emma Raymond Pitman, *Heroines of the Mission Field* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1880), p. xi.

¹⁹³ Agnes Giberne, *A Lady of England: The Life and Letters of Charlotte Maria Tucker* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895).

framed. There is no strong difference between the treatment of female missionaries by male and by female biographers – no stronger condemnation from one side, or insistent defence on the other - though it is perhaps unsurprising that the more interesting works should have been written by women. As with lives of nuns, the biographers dwell on the split that occurred in these women's lives which enables them in turn to probe conventions of female life. The works are above all sustained reflections on perspective, and the consequences of changing the angle from which one views lives and conventions.

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One of the biggest problems facing biographers of female missionaries was how far to exploit the exotic and exciting potential of the narrative. Biographers were loathe to abandon the emphasis on the celebration of quiet lives when commemorating women. Whereas few biographers scrupled to dwell on the dangers attending male missionaries from ferocious animals or recalcitrant natives, most biographers of women missionaries preferred an emphasis on the more feminine qualities of endurance beneath a hot sun and practical discomforts. One biographer describes the subject's 'quiet daily life in this lonely East African wilderness', a phrase that awkwardly juxtaposes the domestic and the wild. Of Mrs. Beatty, who travelled extensively and drowned on the S. S. *Roumania*, the reader is told that her life was 'only a very quiet life, without much incident or adventure of any kind; so quiet that many may deem its details unworthy of print.' Another missionary's existence is described as 'useful but most quiet and unpretending'.¹⁹⁴ The words recall the almost identical description of women writers, and are similarly disingenuous.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Brewin, *Memoirs of Rebecca Wakefield, Wife of the Rev. T. Wakefield, United Methodist Free Churches Missionary in Eastern Africa* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1876), p. 4; Mrs. George T. Rea, *A Broken Journey: Memoir of Mrs. Beatty, Wife of Rev. William Beatty, Indian Missionary, Lost in the S. S. "Roumania", October 1892* (London: James Nesbit & Co., 1894), p. x; [Anonymous], *In The Light: Brief Memorials of Elizabeth Phebe Seeley. By her sister* (London: The British Syrian Schools and Bible Mission, Seeley & Co., 1884), p. 1.

Only Giberne demonstrates self-consciousness in her use of the terms ‘quiet’ and ‘uneventful’. Unlike the other biographers, she only describes Charlotte Tucker’s pre-missionary life in these terms: ‘quiet and uneventful’ (112), years that ‘passed quietly, with no stirring events’ (138), a ‘quiet home existence’ (189), a ‘quiet English existence’ (174), a ‘quiet English home’ (513). Tucker clearly strains against this inaction, though the biographer never directly denounces traditional feminine etiquette. Instead, by making such associations, Giberne intimates that such feminine behaviour is not innate but a social convention that can therefore be remoulded.

The other biographers attempt to justify their stance by returning to the well-worn theme of the quiet, hidden influence of women. Mrs. Beatty’s biographer appeals to Smiles’s statement that ‘the greater part of the influence exercised by women on the formation of character necessarily remains unknown. [...] The influence they have exercised, though unrewarded, lives after them, and goes on propagating itself in consequences for ever’ (4).¹⁹⁵ No commentary is offered on the quotation, nor on the limitations it imposes on biography. Elizabeth Seeley’s biographer refers to Ruskin’s declaration that ‘the lives we need to have written for us are of the people whom the world has not thought of – far less heard of – who are yet doing the most of the work, and of whom we may learn how it may best be done’.¹⁹⁶ For the biographer, ‘it is just such a life as is written in the following pages’. The idea is then applied in disappointingly narrow terms as the biographer finds the life ‘remarkable’ not for its events but ‘for its self-suppression’ (v). The debate concerning the representation of ‘obscure’ lives was sufficiently pervasive to influence even the most unpretending biographies, but the label of obscurity was paraded to reassure readers that the ensuing life was a largely conventional one, however true that may have been.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted from Smiles, *Character*, p. 54.

¹⁹⁶ Ruskin, ‘Preface’, in Francesca Alexander, *The Story of Ida* (London, 1883), p. iv-v.

Such attitudes reveal the biographers' belief that biography, whether religious or exemplary in a more secular manner, functioned as a safe reading alternative to fiction.

Women of Worth (1859) makes this clear. Non-fiction is intended to restrain the seeds of Bovaryism in female readers.¹⁹⁷ Woman, we are told,

with her glowing heart and lively fancy, tempted ever into the ideal by the construction of her mind, should be a student of the real. Her enthusiasm should be tempered by a knowledge of the actual in human life, so that mere feeling may not lead her into the wild region of romance.¹⁹⁸

The emotionality of fancy ('glowing', 'lively') is set against the idea of fact ('student', 'knowledge'), and fact seems a haven from the cultural otherness of fiction ('temptation', 'wild'). The phrasing is particularly strange, given that the work goes on to provide a sketch of the American missionary Sarah Boardman Judson who was led 'into the wild region', as the title of the sketch, 'The Teacher in the Wilds', makes clear. Double standards lead the writer into outright contradiction:

Mrs. Boardman's tours in the Karen wilderness, with little George, borne in the arms of her followers, beside her – through wild mountain-passes, over swollen streams and deceitful marshes, and among the craggy rocks and tangled shrubs of the jungle – if they could be spread out in detail, would doubtless present scenes of thrilling interest. But her singular modesty always made her silent on a subject which would present her in a light so enterprising and adventurous.¹⁹⁹

This example of having one's cake and eating it expresses the subject's (or more precisely the biographer's) modesty regarding her extraordinary adventures, and her desire to suppress picturesque details, whilst the sentence finds a means of integrating the excitement that it claims to hide. The narrator pretends to imitate the subject's modesty and avoids the fact that Boardman's adventures *are* depicted, in great detail, throughout the sketch.

The biographies as a whole maintain this double movement between display and concealment, and between romance and reality. In her biography of the missionary Irene

¹⁹⁷ Flaubert's novel had been put on trial only two years earlier.

¹⁹⁸ *Women of Worth*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 93.

Petrie (1864-1897), Mrs. Carus-Wilson uses the expectation of readers that missionary biography would deliver a colourful narrative to stress instead the unromantic nature of the missionary life. She is harsh towards the 'sentimental and rather weak-minded type' of woman that misunderstands the nature of missionary life, and readers, male or female, 'who regard missions as a romantic enterprise'.²⁰⁰ Her subject had 'no romantic notion concerning the 'picturesque heathen' (88). This is in line with biographies that encouraged women to study the real over the exotic.

More interestingly, however, the biographer sees romanticisation and poetry as a force that can inhibit female lives. When considering the condition of women in Eastern zenanas,²⁰¹ Carus-Wilson considers that

poets like Byron and Moore, who were never in the East, have thrown over her imprisonment a glamour of gleaming robes and dazzling jewels, of perfume and flowers and music (39).

Female misery has been masked by a (masculine) distortion of reality, which glamorises rather than condemns zenana life. There is the barest hint that the poetic idealisation of women through images of 'perfume and flowers and music' could also be dangerous for those remaining in England. Most of the narratives struggle to find a balance between gritty reality and exoticism – and even Carus-Wilson's biography contains, despite her, its share of exciting events. Unlike in the biographies of nuns, where poetry is used to bring out the attractions of religion, biography is here presented as a genre that tones down the potentially dangerous flights of poetry and romance.

The illustrations in the biographies confirm on the one hand the documentary value of biography, whilst underlining on the other the fact that the biographers cannot resist flirting with the escapist potential of their subject. The biographies are the most lavishly illustrated of

²⁰⁰ Mrs. Ashley Carus-Wilson, *Irene Petrie: Missionary to Kashmir* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), p. 23

²⁰¹ Zenanas were areas of the household, in South Asian countries, where women lived in seclusion.

all types of female biographies, other than collective biographies and children's books. Emma Pitman's collective biographies contain numerous illustrations, which are used in two ways: in a quasi-anthropological manner, with depictions of customs and dress, as with the photograph of the young Indian bride and bridegroom, or to increase the drama of certain scenes, as with the depiction of an 'anxious' moment [Figs. 4-5]. Photographs and sketches mingle, and the factual sits alongside the interpretative. The illustrations reproduce the ambivalence of the text, in which didacticism and entertainment compete.

Other biographers drew more heavily on the documentary rather than dramatic value of illustrations. The biography of Rebecca Wakefield includes pictures of Africans praying, making mats, or hunting, interspersed with ideologically charged images of natives moving from traditional garb to Western clothes and being saved from slavery by Westerners [Figs. 6-7]. The illustrations give an additional narrative of British and white supremacy, separate from the written narrative. Irene Petrie's biography uses photography more than illustrations, and principally in a documentary manner, as does that of Mrs. Beatty. The illustrations act as a compensation for the narratives that deny themselves drama and excitement.



Fig. 4. 'An Anxious Moment,' in Emma Pitman, *Missionary Heroines in Eastern Lands* (1895), p. 1.

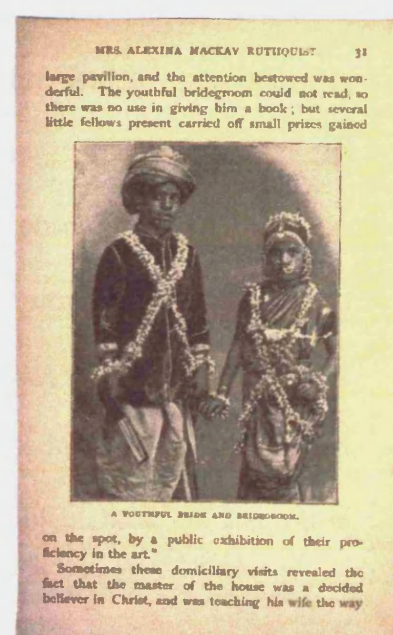


Fig. 5. 'A Youthful Bride and Bridegroom', Emma Pitman, *Missionary Heroines in Eastern Lands* (1895), p. 31.



Fig. 6. 'Slaves rescued by a British Cruiser', in Brewin, *Rebecca Wakefield* (1876), p. 105



Fig. 7. 'Native Christians (Gallas and Wanika) of Ribe', in Brewin, *Rebecca Wakefield* (1876), p. 181

Above all, however, they perpetuate a strange absence: the female missionary is almost never represented, or else only in the distant background. Other than her portrait on the frontispieces, her face is never shown. This underlines the theme of obscurity and submission of the biographies. The urge to display is constantly set against the impulse to conceal. The key drive of the biographers is to maintain a sense of balance. Portraits of the subjects appear in the early parts of the biographies, when the subject was still leading a domestic life in England. They disappear in the second half when the female subject took on her more adventurous role and her voice becomes more present in letters and diaries.

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The biographers are equally keen to tone down any suggestion that their subject was outlandish. In *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880), Emma Pitman insists that female missionaries did not step ‘out of her proper sphere in the slightest degree’ (4). Another biographer adds reassuringly that ‘*duty* with her was ever paramount’.²⁰² Irene Petrie, the biographer insists, was not ‘of the useful but unattractive type that enjoys openly defying the graceful frivolities and small elegancies of her sex’ (16). Femininity is repeatedly stressed in the face of unusual behaviour.

Agnes Giberne brings a greater complexity to the assessment of Charlotte Tucker’s feminine characteristics. She shares a tendency with the other biographers to counterbalance troubling statements (neither ‘gentleness or sweetness’ (21) could describe Tucker in her early life) with reassurance (‘she was in no sense a madcap, being thoroughly a lady’, 21). Yet Giberne also thoroughly questions the importance of traditional female charms. Charlotte Tucker realises her own physical plainness in a pivotal moment:

A wise resolution followed. Since she ‘could never be pretty,’ she determined that she ‘would try to be good, and to do all the good in the world that she could’ (21-2).

Tucker’s conclusion at first confines her to simply another acceptable female role (‘to be good’) yet the addition of ‘in the world’ opens up much wider possibilities, and accrues greater meaning from the subject’s later foreign activities. The biographer encourages flexibility in judging individuals, and states that

what is dangerous for one may not be perilous for another, who is differently constituted. What is needless for one may be an absolute duty for another, who is in quite a different position (68).

²⁰² Rea, *Memoir of Mrs. Beatty*, p. 92.

Once again, the biographer stays clear of controversial statement, yet the choice of the word 'duty', so heavily loaded, can hardly be innocent, and even to suggest that duties are flexible is unusual.

The biographer's awareness throughout the work of the minefield of female representation makes for an unusually complex portrait. Giberne even strives to modify contemporary representations of women:

We do read in certain little books, of a particular calibre, about angelic heroines who were invariably worshipped by everybody in their small world, without a single exception. This, however, is, to say the least, uncommon; and with one of Charlotte Tucker's strong personality it would be all but impossible (160).

As when Irene Petrie's biographer complains of the harm done by Romantic poetry on the condition of women in India, Giberne blames contemporary literature (the word 'heroines' suggests that Giberne is alluding to fiction) for simplifying the complex female character. The biography relentlessly tugs against the narrow confines of female life. The passage is as much an attack on those works as on smallness itself – 'little' books, 'small' world.

All the biographies in this group turn to a device to enable their subjects – once a sufficient emphasis on their womanliness has been made – to move beyond conventional female behaviour: the pattern of death and rebirth. Indeed, the decision to abandon home life for foreign work was as decisive a rupture from the domestic sphere as the decision of some women to enter a convent, and these transitions are depicted in very similar ways. The subject receives a call from God, the farewells are described in terms of mourning, and the woman moves into the unknown. Rebecca Wakefield is described as having laid her life 'upon the Missionary altar years before, and now God was pleased to accept the sacrifice' (24). The missionary 'passed through the painful ordeal of parting from many of her dearest earthly friends, and from her dear native land, "for Christ's sake and the Gospel's" never to return to it again' (25). In Giberne's biography, the beginning of Tucker's missionary experiences is

preceded by the kind of character summary that usually concluded a Victorian biography, together with the biographer's solemn statement that 'so ended the fifty-four years of Charlotte Maria Tucker's English Life' (188). The work pauses and resumes in 'Part Two', in which the tone of the work changes as the subject's powerful voice becomes far more present and the biographer retreats into the background.²⁰³ The division is exacerbated as the subject has less need of the literary pseudonym that both advertised and obscured her – A.L.O.E – as she goes abroad, and becomes 'Charlotte Tucker'. The all-important journey from the missionary's home to her land of employment creates a pivotal moment in all of the biographies, and enables the subject's initial domestic sphere and later land of employment to appear uncontaminated by the other.²⁰⁴

Again, as in biographies of nuns, this division creates an imbalance in the works in terms of the subject's and the biographer's voices, though here the pattern is reversed. Missionary biographies exacerbate the natural tendency of Victorian biography to focus more on the subject's later years than on his or her youth, as letters written home were of immense importance to missionaries. Consequently, the biographer's voice is far more present in the initial, domestic, sections, which carefully frame the subject, than in the later half where the missionary speaks for herself. The biographer provides linking narratives between letters or diary entries, and often brings a Christian content to the largely secular letters penned by the missionaries regarding trips, encounters and local customs.

The sharp shift between the biographer's voice in the first half and the frequently strong voices of the subject in the second increases the impression that the departure from Britain and the embracing of foreign work acted as a release through which the subject could

²⁰³ See also Brewin, *Memoirs of Rebecca Wakefield*; Carus-Wilson, *Irene Petrie*; [John Harrison], *A. Mackay Ruthquist* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893).

²⁰⁴ Biographies of *male* missionaries, which would form a category beyond the remit of this work, naturally often contained a similar pattern. Yet what is specific to biographies of female missionaries is that the structure imposed by the life enabled a unique commentary on femininity and domesticity.

more fully realise herself. The biographers draw attention to this lack of unity within the life rather than create a sense of cohesion, as this leaves gender stereotypes within England undisturbed. The confrontation of the two halves provides, however, an implicit commentary.

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Whereas nuns retreated within an even more private enclosure, however, female missionaries moved from insiders to outsiders. This provided them and their biographies with a rare opportunity to compare and contrast English values and conventions with foreign ones. Comparison, with its implications that behaviour is not universal and innate but dependent on a variety of cultural factors, introduces the possibility of analysing female lives more critically.

The works show a consistent fascination with homes – with those the women abandoned, and those they encountered. Most biographies include a sketch or photograph of their subject's foreign home. A common observation made by the biographers is the almost complete lack of privacy in missionary dwellings, yet the lack of boundaries also implies a greater freedom. George Rea's life of Mrs. Beatty is the work most concerned with missionaries' endeavours to renegotiate ideas of domesticity. Rootless missionary families, Rea notes, were generally not 'particularly attached to any house or place, either in India or at home' (90). The missionary's foreign home is 'large and airy, with shaded verandas, and various doors, all open, where everybody may walk out and in at pleasure' (111), but is a house that the inhabitants abandon without emotion. On the other hand, in England the missionary

is as dependent on his home as any other man; he has home and *fireside*, home and fatherland, home and children, home with its one front door, which could keep it sacred from the whole outside world if he chose (111-2).

The contrast is ambiguous, as the Indian home conveys an image of freedom ('airy'), whilst the British home, loaded with symbolism ('fatherland', 'sacred') entails the notion of

dependence. Strangely, there is no mention of a wife in either picture. Whereas the first suggests a certain democracy of movement ('everybody may walk out and in'), the second more surprisingly excludes the female presence. Rea seems to suggest, obliquely, that Mrs. Beatty had managed to detach herself from the comparative oppression of the British home. The biographers, as a group, use comparison to comment on women's opportunities without appearing directly confrontational.

The most striking contrast, however, is between Englishwomen and foreign women. The comparison is particularly complex for women who travelled to India, where the notion of the Indian women both belonging to the British Empire and yet living in such different conditions made the tension between the self and the other particularly acute. The scrutiny of foreign standards of femininity is most often introduced by the biographer rather than through the missionary's own letters. The most startling example of such a comparison occurs in the second chapter of Pitman's *Heroines of the Mission Field*. The chapter opens:

Two pictures arise before the mind's eye – one of an English wife, the other of a Hindoo wife. The English wife sits in the bright, warm, cosy sitting-room, bright with pictures, books, furniture, fire-light, and the gambols of merry children – herself the centre of all household joy. The Hindoo wife is shut up in her apartments like a prisoner, or waits upon her lord and master like a slave [...] and after waiting in silence and submission until he has appeased his hunger, she withdraws to her own apartments, there to feed on the remnants of his repast' (21).

The parallels continue for several paragraphs: the happy English bride, mother, and unhappy but comforted widow is opposed to the miserable Hindoo child-bride, mother and cast-off widow. The Hindoo woman is represented as subjected to an excessive enforcement of the division of spheres: 'shut up' and submissive. The conclusion maintains this duality:

From east, west, north and south, our sometime heathen sisters are rising up, shaking off their bonds, and becoming in deed and in truth the Lord's free-women. And in years to come they, too, shall in their turn minister to others who now sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (41).

Vague revolutionary imagery of bonds being shaken off is coupled with the less threatening picture of women who seek to 'minister to others', so that imagery of discord is redirected as a feminine image of healing. Pitman's work neatly encapsulates many of the tensions within numerous biographies of missionary women, in which it is uncertain whether the biographer is genuinely divided regarding the expansion of female opportunities, or is using safe images of womanhood to introduce more controversial ideas. [Fig. 8]

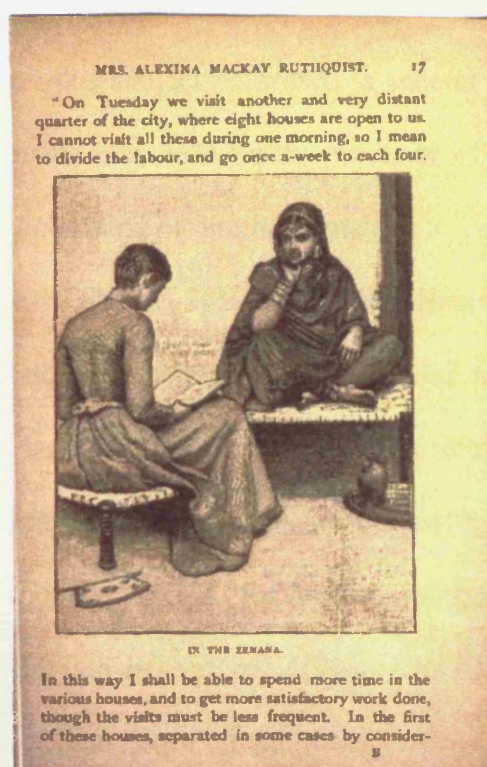


Fig. 8. 'In the Zenana', in Pitman, *Missionary Heroines in Eastern Lands* (1895) p. 17.

Several accounts in full-length biographies are similar. Carus-Wilson, for example, comments of woman in India that 'the system begins by despising and degrading her, and ends by distrusting, insulting, imprisoning her, and placing her all her life under the absolute rule of some man – in childhood of her father, in wifedom of her husband, in widowhood of her son' (168). Though this description could just as easily have applied to a woman in the English domestic sphere, the biographer does not push the analysis further.

The missionaries saw the improvement of women's conditions in India as part of their work. It is difficult to determine, however, in what light they considered the conditions of Englishwomen. Though, as Linda Peterson argues, the 'cause of Western women's rights and opportunities appears repeatedly in accounts of women missionaries',²⁰⁵ this 'feminist' content is not entirely straightforward. The biographers are often nervous in calling for the expansion of female roles. The missionary Harriet Urmston's biographer argues nervously, for example, that though 'Holy Scripture distinctly limits the preaching in church [...] to men', this subject possessed 'a special gift and a special guidance of God's Spirit'.²⁰⁶ Emma Pitman boldly calls for the provision of medical training for women, yet continually returns to the upholding of feminine qualities.

Giberne, again, is the only biographer to make an explicit comparison between foreign and domestic female oppression. Her description of her subject's home duties comes close to the language Emma Pitman uses to depict zenana life. Like so many subjects of female biography, Charlotte Tucker placed 'home-duties' (117) before her career as an author and missionary. Indeed, 'for her parents' sake she had dutifully held back [...] from much that she would fain have done' (174). The disappearance of a stable home, through her relatives' marriage or death, liberates her:

But finding herself thus unfettered, the thought came up, - [...] Why not set an example to others who, like herself, might with advancing years be left free of ties? (174).

Loneliness is turned into an advantage, and the biographer carefully introduces such loaded words as 'unfettered' in a paragraph framed by the language of duty and exemplarity. Giberne makes explicit what other biographers imply. They describe the 'other' in terms that can be

²⁰⁵ Linda H. Peterson, "'The Feelings and Claims of Little People': Heroic Missionary Memoirs, Domestic(ated) Spiritual Autobiography, and *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*", in *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography*, p. 95.

²⁰⁶ George Everard, *The Starry Crown: A Sketch of the Life Work of Harriet E. H. Urmston* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), pp. 80-1.

readily applied to the domestic Englishwomen, yet avoid condemnations of impropriety by mediating their criticism through foreign women.

The movement between home and abroad in fact leaves the subjects in a form of limbo. On the one hand they are clearly differentiated from foreign women. On the other hand they appear starkly different from the images of the domestic Englishwomen that they left behind – sisters, mothers, friends who appear in their letters. Charlotte Tucker, Irene Petrie, and many of the subjects included in Pitman's collection did not confine themselves in a home, nor marry, nor become mothers. They reflect neither model of femininity. Most of the biographers waver between the two models and use them to create a narrative that can be read either as a reassuring account of the supremacy of English womanhood or as a cry for female liberation, but they do not commit themselves.

Agnes Giberne uses contrasts and comparisons to create a more fluid identity for her subject. Charlotte Tucker's work is often discussed in terms that could apply to both men and women. She is often compared to men: her brother, a missionary, whose 'example, long after, was closely copied by his sister' (106), or Bishop French ('in some respects the two were much alike', 430). Giberne also draws extensively on the image of the Christian soldier (there are echoes of the biographies of Sir Henry Havelock) to describe her subject. In the first chapter, Tucker sets an example by 'buckling on her armour afresh, and of entering upon the toughest toil of all her busy life' (3), and she is later compared to one of the 'noble six hundred' (191), following higher orders despite knowing the uselessness of the outcome. These comments are significant partly because of the rarity with which women in biographies were compared with masculine models.

Giberne is unusual in flaunting her subject's complexity, and in portraying a clumsy woman who relentlessly plays her guitar to her migraine-suffering friend – the very antithesis of the ministering female - and who displayed 'through life a marked deficiency in the

housekeeping line' (161). Giberne claims that her subject 'was a many-sided and to some extent a complex nature. [...] There were a good many opposites in the character of Charlotte Tucker' (159). These missionary biographies as a whole suggest, and Giberne's work powerfully demonstrates, that comparisons and contrasts liberate the female subject.

Oppositions – private versus public, inside versus outside, domestic versus foreign – force analysis and assessment. In a genre where female subjects were regularly depicted as unified and one-sided (or were condemned if they strayed from established patterns), drawing out differences and complexities was in itself a radical gesture, however timidly expressed. The implications of changing perspective are dealt with in interesting ways. It is worth being wary of making too much of how biographers constructed the lives of their subjects: in many cases, the simple facts of the life (a retreat into a convent, a departure abroad) suggested a theme rather than the theme suggesting a specific treatment. Nevertheless, the fact that biographers employed a broadly similar treatment for subjects who were markedly different in temperament and whose experiences varied greatly suggests that the biographers were alert to the implications of structuring a female life in a certain manner.

It is natural that biographies of 'obscure' lives should be centrally concerned with perspective. 'Obscure' is defined in contrast to fame, and the choice of such a subject provokes comparisons. Curiously, in the biographies of nuns and female missionaries, a change of perspective is used to question ideas on the stability of the British nation. As such, they are almost unique amongst biographies of 'obscure' lives as a group, which were concerned with how a reconsideration of 'obscure' lives could regenerate the nation. What is striking in all these works, however, is that the representation of an 'obscure' life went repeatedly beyond the individual to address the nature and condition of the nation.

Chapter Three

'The simple annals of the poor': Biographies of Working-Class Men

The literary representation of the Victorian working classes has been given such sustained attention in connection with novels, autobiography and essays that the absence of consideration given to biographies seems all the more surprising. The label 'working class', which many of the biographers used, is here best interpreted loosely as alluding to individuals living in relative poverty. Like many contemporary working-class autobiographies, these biographies were concerned with the tension generated by a subject being singled out from his community. They also have affinities with the early- to mid-Victorian social problem novels that proposed Christian charity and improved individual moral conduct instead of institutional reforms as solutions to social discord. Biography adds a new perspective by combining the outsider's vision of the novelist with the insider's view provided by 'real' subjects.

Three principal groups within the biographical representation of subjects from humble life can be distinguished. Exemplary biographies were published throughout the nineteenth-century in fairly consistent numbers and constitute the largest body of work. The quality of these works varies extensively, though as a whole it is poor. They were mostly written not only about, but for, the working classes and are often condescending in their approach and limited in the lessons they try to inculcate.

By far the most interesting works are the lives of scientists of humble life that appeared towards the end of the century as the individuals who had participated in the mid-century passion for natural science passed away. Though such men were usually commemorated in collective biographies, Samuel Smiles and the lesser-known William Jolly presented their humble scientists to the public in a form traditionally reserved for great lives. It is worth dwelling at greater length on these biographies which are a uniquely Victorian product that developed from the exemplary biographies that Smiles himself had helped to popularize.

The relationship between the public and the subject lies at the heart of biographies of ‘uneducated’ poets. The eighteenth century had witnessed an increasing interest in poets from humble life and biographical sketches of such authors were common. Frederick Martin’s *The Life of John Clare* (1865) is unusual in being a full-length biography of a poet, now justly famous, who had lapsed into obscurity and whom Martin, a Carlyle disciple, sought to rescue. It is also perhaps the only full-length biography of a subject from humble life that defiantly rejects the assumption that working-class lives ought to be represented in a narrowly exemplary form.

The nineteenth century produced other biographies of men who were born into poverty but these were men who, like George Stephenson, achieved fame despite their poverty. The lives of ‘obscure’ working men brought a different angle to the question of the individual’s place in society. The biographies present narratives in which personal desire is often in conflict with communal responsibilities. In response to this, the genre of biography is repeatedly presented as a space of possible social reconciliation.

Exemplary lives

The works that most commonly depicted the lives of men from humble life were didactic biographies of exemplary individuals. As with other types of ‘obscure’ subjects, collective biographies were particularly suited for such subjects regarding whom little was known. The more interesting works were those that sought to provide role models for working men but placed an equal emphasis on helping the wealthier classes to meet and understand them. Edwin Paxton Hood felt that the ‘highly educated know but little of the great mental achievements of the children of the soil’²⁰⁷ and wrote three significant works of collective biography to remedy this, with titles such as the self-descriptive *Genius and Industry: The Achievements of Mind Among the Cottages* (1851). Matthew Davenport-Hill’s *Our Exemplars: Rich and Poor* (1861) is another important work prefaced by Lord Brougham (founder of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge) who proclaims that ‘there is much to be learnt from the history of those who have neither gained any renown, nor attained brilliant position, nor even displayed rare capacity’.²⁰⁸ Though collective biographies projected a democratic ideal in which unknown and humble subjects such as Bridget Burke, a domestic servant, rub shoulders with the King of Portugal, empathy rather than social change is their objective. Single-subject exemplary biographies were less adventurous in their choice of subjects than collective works, and religious biographies, self-help books, and the accounts that sprung from the temperance movement form the bulk of this group.

Religious biographies of humble subjects were extremely popular throughout the nineteenth century, though reprints of the more celebrated works began to diminish towards the end of the period. They closely resembled the all-pervasive tracts distributed to the poor that combined didacticism and biographical sketches. Like these tracts, it is hard to

²⁰⁷ Edwin Paxton Hood, *The Peerage of Poverty* (London: Judd & Glass, 1859), p. 1.

²⁰⁸ Lord Brougham, ‘Preface’, *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich* (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1861), p. xiii.

distinguish between fictional tales made to resemble biographies and real-life accounts with a veneer of romance, and equally difficult to determine the workers' response to religious biographies, though the numerous editions suggests that many were well received.

These religious biographies did not originate with the Victorians. Short accounts of poor men or women who led intensely religious lives or converted to Christianity were rife in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The most significant of these was *The Dairyman's Daughter*, written by the Reverend Legh Richmond, a friend of Wilberforce and Hannah More. It was hugely successful: an estimated two million copies were printed in English by the time of Richmond's death, and even the wealthier classes were catered for with neater, pricier editions. The work was originally published in the *Christian Guardian* in 1809 and reprinted along with sketches of other humble lives in 1814 under the title *The Annals of The Poor*. The narrative recounts how Elizabeth Wallbridge, a servant, lived an irreligious life until the age of twenty-six, when she converted after hearing a powerful sermon. After carefully studying the Bible she died aged only thirty-one.

Though it is difficult now to recapture the impact of this work, it provided a model for later religious biographies in several ways. Richmond expressed the belief that 'if we want to see religion in its most simple and pure character, we must look for it among the poor of this world'.²⁰⁹ Didactic biographers, and clergymen in particular, were quick to pick up this hint. Such narratives combined the dramatic power of the saint's life with the intensity of a sermon. Like Richmond, later biographers evoked the poorer classes to illustrate piety rather than the realities of working-class life; they used a similar autobiographical frame in which the writer (usually a clergyman) narrates his discovery of, and encounter with, the subject; they maintained Richmond's episodic style of narration which privileges key spiritual moments rather than the concrete facts of the subject's life, and tried their hand at passages of

²⁰⁹ [Legh Richmond], *The Annals of the Poor* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1828), p. 2.

descriptive scenery, which Gary Kelly has termed 'Romantic Evangelicalism'.²¹⁰ Richmond was amongst the first to use Thomas Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' directly in such a biography, and 'annals of the poor' became a staple manner of alluding to the poor in titles and prefaces. Indeed, it is uncertain whether biographers were referring to Gray or to Richmond, although biographies clearly engaged more directly with the latter than the former.²¹¹

Despite this important precedent, Victorian religious biographers of humble subjects wrote with a conviction of their own innovative spirit. The biographers explicitly pit their works against the current fashion for Great Lives. The clergyman-biographer of a pious miner dedicates his narrative 'To the Working Men of England', before noting with sympathy that the poorer classes cannot find themselves or their experiences reflected in the 'lives of eminent men [that] are now often published'.²¹² The popular didactic writer Cecilia Lucy Brightwell similarly laments that few members of the working classes 'have given us the personal record of their experience', a lack which her sketches of humble-born workers is intended to remedy.²¹³ Yet another biographer, writing in 1866, called for accounts of individuals 'who have *lived and died as Working Men in the humbler walks of life*', since the poor do not yet have their 'Representative Men' commemorated in '*extended* memoirs'. Though the work is only 156 pages long, he believes that his is one of the 'very few *more extended*' accounts of an obscure working man.²¹⁴ It is ironic that whereas critics were increasingly begging biographers to write more concise and structured biographies of

²¹⁰ Gary Kelly, 'Romantic Evangelicalism: Religion, Social Conflict, and Literary Form in Legh Richmond's *Annals of the Poor*,' *ESQ*, 16 (June 1990), p. 165.

²¹¹ See D.C. nos 83; 95; 148.

²¹² Rev. S. Allen Windle, *The Christian Workman; Being a Memoir of John Bentley* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh & Hunt, 1858), p. 5.

²¹³ Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, *Heroes of the Laboratory and the Workshop* (London: Routledge, Warnes & Routledge, 1859), p. vi.

²¹⁴ W. Davis Tyack, *The Miner of Perranzabuloe: Or, Simple Records of a Good Man's Life* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1866), p. vii.

Eminent Men, biographers of more humble lives saw the heavy tomes as tokens of seriousness and status.

Similarly, the biographers take it upon themselves to question contemporary ideas of greatness and heroism. This is best illustrated in the *Hero of the Humber* (1880), a biography of a heroic foreman written by the Reverend Henry Woodcock. The work opens with a comparison of Gladstone's and Carlyle's conception of heroism, in which Woodcock praises Carlyle's flexible definition of a hero. For Woodcock, a hero has 'ends beyond himself' and need not have 'very great powers'. Woodcock uses this generous definition to insist that his own subject was a hero despite having no "'great powers" of intellect' and though 'he lived in a humble cottage'.²¹⁵ What follows, however, is an entirely conventional narrative. A significant element of the biographer's ambivalence is the fact that moderate acts are encouraged. This reflected a more general Victorian concern with balance and harmony, but also reflects the writer's desire to maintain the subject as an agent in his own limited sphere.

The prefaces repeatedly announce a provocative analysis of society that is regularly disappointed in the ensuing narratives. The promise of a truthful account of working-class life gives way to spiritual reflections and episodic illustrations of working-class piety as if the biographer were luring the reader in with the false promise of social commentary and a true reflection of their lives. The constant reiteration by the biographers that they were creating a novel type of work also provided the thrill of a call to arms that is then broken down, as if to prevent the development of a more radical working-class movement. Indeed, the biographers' claims to build a new class of working-class biography are belied by the fact that all the writers present their subjects in an almost identical manner as gems hidden beneath a 'plain and rustic garb', an image that owes more to the Bible than to Chartism.

²¹⁵ Rev. Henry Woodcock, *The Hero of the Humber: Or, the History of the Late Mr. John Ellerthorpe* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1880), pp. v-vi.

The most interesting religious biographer of humble life, who is representative of the group but who also strove to produce genuinely powerful works, is the Methodist biographer James Everett. (Methodists heavily encouraged the commemoration of their local heroes and itinerant preachers.) Everett began work as a grocer's apprentice before joining the Wesleyan Methodist Society in 1803 and becoming a popular itinerant minister. He gained notoriety upon being suspected to be the author of the Fly Sheets, anonymous pamphlets attacking the leadership and organization of the Wesleyans that prompted a national controversy and Everett's own expulsion from the Wesleyan Conference. *The Village Blacksmith* (1831), his biography of Samuel Hick (1758-1829), a local Yorkshire preacher and blacksmith, ran into numerous editions. This full-length biography, which takes its title from Longfellow's poem of the same name, displays all of the features of Legh Richmond's earlier work, and brings to it a more contemporary tone.

Though *The Village Blacksmith* is slow-paced and the style frequently tortuous, Everett expresses a desire for a more sophisticated type of biographical writing. The preface launches into a reflection on the current state of biography, which is deemed to have 'either depreciated the character of their subjects, or over-rated their excellences'. In contrast, Everett claims to have 'taken up the character of Samuel Hick as it *was*, not as he *wished* it, nor as it *ought* to be; and has *left* the man as he *found* him – *in the rough*, and unadorned'.²¹⁶ Everett enjoys breaking biographical conventions. He gives, for example, an early description of the blacksmith, instead of the 'usual biographical mode' that consists of unveiling 'his subject at the close of his work, in the exhibition of a summary sketch of character' (59-60).

Though Everett arose from a humble background himself, his depiction of social classes diffuses any possible political reading. He is respectful towards the poor and relies far less on caricature than many of the other biographers. Most strikingly, the second half of his

²¹⁶ James Everett, *The Village Blacksmith; or, Piety and Usefulness Exemplified in a Memoir of the Life of Samuel Hick, Late of Micklefield, Yorkshire* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1831), p. vii.

later biography *The Wall's End Miner* (1835) is a moving and detailed social document on the catastrophe that occurred at the Wall's End Pit in 1835, when 103 people died. Nevertheless, he avoids dwelling on their appalling working conditions and the political climate of the times. In the earlier work, his hero, the blacksmith Samuel Hick, does not threaten social boundaries. He appreciates his superiors ('I am privileged with getting into the company of gentlemen, and I never let these opportunities slip', 78), is a keen tax-payer ('no man was more ready to pay the taxes imposed by Government than himself', 84) and a patriot ('never did a subject in any realm pour out with greater sincerity and fervour the prayer – "God save the King"', 117). The biographer mediates between the subject and the reader and carefully frames the working man.

Similarly, James Everett does not plead for greater opportunities, educational or other, for his subject. He notes approvingly of his hero in *The Village Blacksmith* that he was

untaught in the *school* of this world: *art* would have been lost upon him; he was one upon whom education and polished society [...] could never have had their full effect; he seemed forged by Nature, as well as designed by Providence, for the forge (64).

The biographer plays with the reader's desire to see the subject as the type of peasant represented in Romantic poetry who delights in his rural environment. The invocation of Providence informs the reader that there is no question here of class transgression: individuals are born into the classes for which they are best suited. The circular nature of the phrase ('forged by Nature [...] for the forge') creates a sense of inevitability that is experienced not as a constraint but as stability. The passage reassures middle-class readers whilst encouraging working-class readers to look to their own natural resources. Everett insists that the biography demonstrates 'that every man, woman, and child, can do something – can do *much*' and that

‘one word of pious counsel [...] may extend to eternity’.²¹⁷ The sphere of influence, however, concerns the heavens rather than the world below.

The biographers aim to satisfy the lower class reader’s lurking desire for a higher social status by turning the religious working man into a gentleman worker. Repeatedly, the pious subject is distanced from his community, which is depicted as rough and small-minded. One biographer describes the language of his pious miner as ‘singularly pure, for one whose advantages had been so few’,²¹⁸ another expostulates on his collier’s ‘gentle manners, almost amounting to refinement’.²¹⁹ This privileged status offers no material benefits, however. Whilst the biographers depict their subject’s detachment from other irreligious workers as something to be celebrated, the pious worker’s increasing isolation from his community is disturbing. By singling out individual men from amidst their community for the ‘privilege’ of biographical commemoration, the biographers perpetuated this rift.

The subject is carefully framed by his biographer. Samuel Hick, who had known Everett, had given the biographer autobiographical fragments with the ‘solemn injunction’ that Everett prepare them for publication. Everett felt, however, that most of the pieces were unfit for the public, and was not influenced by the impatience Hick expressed for the completion of the Memoir. The biographer admits that he ‘purposely delayed’ fulfilling his promise until after his subject’s death (viii-x). The repression of the subject’s voice is all the more surprising as, since Hick was a local preacher, one expects that his language would have been polished and appealing. The fragments that are given in the biography are edited and could easily have come from any of the subjects in this group of works. What is perhaps most striking about Everett’s apparent betrayal of Hick is the unconcerned tone with which he confesses it. The power struggle between biographer and humble subject is one that took on

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 256.

²¹⁸ Tyack, *The Miner of Perranzabuloe*, p. 9.

²¹⁹ [Andrews, Elizabeth], *The Good Master; Or, Light in a Dark Place* (London: Morgan & Chase, 1865), p. 6.

even greater proportions between Samuel Smiles and Thomas Edward, discussed below. In both cases, it brings out an important aspect of the nature of biographies of working-class subjects: the desire to control and supervision of the working man's voice.

At the mid-century, Samuel Smiles helped to popularize a different kind of exemplary literature. Smiles, one of the most prolific and successful of Victorian biographers, was born into a modest Calvinist family. He initially trained to become a surgeon and moved into a more literary sphere after editing the radical *Leeds Times*. He is now principally remembered for *Self-Help* (1859), a collection of vignettes of hard-working individuals from all walks of life that sold 20,000 copies in its first year. Many of his other biographies were also bestsellers, and his readers reached from working-class men seeking inspiration to middle-class men imbued with the spirit of entrepreneurship.

Smiles did not invent the self-help ideology but disseminated it in such a way that it filtered through into much of the biographical (and indeed non-biographical) literature of the time. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, founded in 1826, sought to promote the education of the lower middle classes and working classes through academic and didactic publications. The SDUK, along with societies such as the Mechanics' Institute, responded to the emergence of a new type of working class and the increase of literacy. Success was mixed, however, as the Society's publications became increasingly loss-making and it ended in 1848. George Lillie Craik's *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties*, published under the auspices of the SDUK in 1830-1, set out to 'show how the most unpropitious circumstances have been unable to conquer an ardent desire for the acquisition of knowledge',²²⁰ and exemplifies the type of self-help works written in the early century. Smiles broadly shared with these works their faith in biography as a motivational tool, though

²²⁰ G. L. Craik, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: Illustrated by Anecdotes* (London: Nattali and Bond, 1830-1), vol I, p. 1.

he repeatedly urged that it is 'action rather than study' that mattered.²²¹ One of the reasons why Smiles succeeded where the SDUK ultimately failed was the contemporary context. Smiles's works began to appear in the 1850s, when the Great Exhibition of 1851 had brought a new sense of the British confidence and supremacy that Smiles's biographies and collective biographies, with their industrial bias, mirrored. The renowned publisher John Murray gave him additional status, and the biographies themselves were lively and well written.

Smiles's biographies are, at their core, concerned with the individual's ability to shape his life. Like Carlyle, Smiles spiritualised work as a force enabling man to control his environment. As Tim Travers argues, Smiles's attitude to work 'depended on the largely religious hope that work would help discipline and form the internal character, and at the same time that work would be conducted according to approved internalised principles of behaviour'.²²² The virtues he stressed were those of perseverance, self-denial and independence. In tandem, Smiles regarded with suspicion the ability of state intervention to improve society. He shared with most mid-century thinkers a conviction that answers to social problems were best approached in terms of changes in individual behaviour.²²³

The nation, for Smiles, was built by the aggregation of individual acts. Smiles introduced *Self-Help* with Mill's closing statement in *On Liberty*, published the same year, that 'the worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it; [...] with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.'²²⁴ Like Carlyle, Eliot and Mill, Smiles believed that 'many are the lives of men unwritten, which have nevertheless as powerfully influenced civilization and progress as the more fortunate Great whose names are

²²¹ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 6.

²²² Tim Travers, *Samuel Smiles and the Victorian Work Ethic* (London, 1987), p. 29.

²²³ See Josephine Guy, *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel* (London, 1996).

²²⁴ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London, 1859), p. 207, quoted by Smiles in *Self-Help* (1859), p. 1 as 'the worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it'.

recorded in biography'.²²⁵ Smiles – like Carlyle – sought a balance between both types of subjects. On the one hand Smiles applauded Carlyle's statement that 'Universal History is, at bottom, but the history of Great Men'²²⁶ and illustrated this with sketches of Shakespeare, Scott, Newton, or Wellington. On the other hand, he argued that 'greatness' is a 'comparative' value that can be over-estimated, as 'very few have the opportunity of being great'. Of more value to the nation is that 'each man can act his part honestly and honourably'.²²⁷ If the humblest individual possessed the capability of contributing to the national welfare to such a strong degree, paying close attention to humbler lives need no longer be dismissed as a trivial activity but as one of national regeneration. The problem of commemorating an obscure life becomes solved by the belief that what appears as the atypical and exceptional elevation of one man becomes, through the multiplication of such biographical endeavours, an image of the elevation of society as a whole.

Nevertheless, Smiles stayed very clear of encouraging class transgression and downplayed suggestions that his books advocated the pursuit of wealth and social advancement. Smiles later rejected his early radicalism and regarded the Chartist movement with distaste, though he remained acutely aware of the hardships of working-class life. He stated that 'want of sympathy pervades all classes – the poor, the working, the middle, and the upper classes. There are many social gaps between them, which cannot yet be crossed'.²²⁸ The 'yet' is misleading. Smiles did not believe that the working classes should move up in society. Rather, self-help would create a more content and more moral working class. This faith in individual potential combined with an enduring belief in distinct social classes means that Smiles is unclear regarding the part of free will and determinism in individual destinies. His heroes succeed both with the help of, and despite, the environment into which they are born.

²²⁵ Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 4.

²²⁶ Smiles, *Character*, p. 22.

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

²²⁸ Samuel Smiles, *Thrift* (London: John Murray, 1875), pp. 180-1.

The temperance biographies that formed a large share of the exemplary biographical literature towards the end of the century combined the religious depictions of the working classes prevalent in the earlier half of the century with Smilesian self-help ideals. Though the temperance movement became active in the 1830s, roughly in tandem with the SDUK, debates reached new heights in the years leading up to and from the 1872 Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Bill that limited the opening hours of drinking places.

The biographies are more directly aimed at the working classes than other self-help biographies, as it was common to identify alcoholism as a working-class problem. Unlike with religious biographies, the subjects are overwhelmingly from urban or industrial environments. The biographer of one successful work, *From Loom to Lawyer's Gown* (1884), Harriet Carson, was a blind writer of Christian self-help works; another, J. A. Hammerton, authored his 1892 biography of a drunkard-turned-temperance lecturer when he was at the beginning of his career as statesman and man of letters. More topical than the broader religious works, they appeared alongside novels such as Mrs. Henry Wood's *Danesbury House* (1860) that, like them, pleaded for temperance in sensational terms and they are more concerned than other working-class biographers with constructing a captivating narrative, often accompanied by vivid illustrations. The pious Harriet Carson takes evident pleasure in recounting the most sensational and macabre scenes, as does Hammerton, who concludes a tale of a drunken engineer's death after falling head-first amongst machinery with the comment that 'the engine completed what Satan had begun!'²²⁹

Hammerton signals awareness that this genre grew out of earlier forms of exemplary biography. He prefers biographies relating 'the life-histories of those whose experiences are eminently worthy of being put on record, so that readers may profit thereby', rather than that

²²⁹ J. A. Hammerton, *Trial and Triumph: A Life and Its Lessons, Being a Biographical Sketch of Robert Dransfield* (London: Scottish Permissive Bill and Temperance Association, 1892), p. 18.

type of biography ‘which chronicles the humble but successful efforts of those who have forged ahead and obtained a position among a nation’s celebrities, “risen from the ranks”’ – a veiled allusion to Smiles (11-2). His hero’s good works are undertaken not for himself but ‘for the cause of God and humanity’ (76). Yet Dransfield’s life clearly progresses from degradation to relative prosperity. Similarly, Carson’s biography is sub-titled ‘Self Help that Was Not All For Self’, and as such both acknowledges and seeks to distance itself from the what was perceived as the selfish Smilesian model. A reviewer in the *British Messenger* admired the fact that the subject’s desire had been ‘the desire to serve God and benefit his fellow-men’ rather than ‘mere success’. Yet, again, success there is. An American reviewer interpreted the work as an illustration of ‘English pluck’ motivated by a ‘determination to win a name, achieve a position’,²³⁰ which suggests that Americans may have been more comfortable with the idea of working-class entrepreneurs than the English.

The religious biographies, self-help and temperance biographies represent the poorer classes in a similar light. Peter Keating’s survey of temperance fiction concludes that representations of the poor were limited to two types: ‘on the one hand, the respectable working man who epitomizes all that is good, simply because he abstains and is able to spend his money on a home and family; and on the other, the drunkard who beats his wife and rolls senseless in the gutter’.²³¹ The biographies maintain this model. From the moment that Dransfield becomes sober, he gains distance from his original class. The previous balanced portrayal of his environment gives way to a more rigid opposition between him and, for example, ‘a rough, drunken mining district’ (48). The gradual detachment of the enlightened worker from his community remains a recurrent theme in most exemplary biographies about working-class subjects.

²³⁰ Both quoted in Harriet Carson, *From the Loom to the Lawyer’s Gown; Or, Self-Help that was not all for Self: Being Incidents in the Life of Mr. Mark Knowles, Barrister-at-Law* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1884), prefatory matter.

²³¹ Peter Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London, 1971), pp. 41-2.

Such portrayals combine the celebration of individualism and a middle-class fear of the mass. Chartism appears in both Carson's and Hammerton's biographies as something to be feared or mocked. (Both wrote in the 1880s when concern over urban workers and Socialism had replaced the widespread anxieties regarding Radicalism in the 1840s.) The former labels the movement directly as 'dangerous' and 'evil influences' (15). Chartist leaders are depicted as frustrated and troublesome social elements with 'peculiar ideas as to the rights of property' and for whom 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ was a thing unknown' (15-6). Working-class politics, the biographers intimate, increases rather than smoothes over social difference: political working-class men are 'unsoftened by the love that binds rich and poor in one bond of brotherhood' (Carson, 15-6). Hammerton dampens working-class desire for a better social status, and is disdainful of the 'snobbish' villagers who worship a local aristocratic youth (30). This admiration becomes dangerous when their idol leads them to a twenty-four hour drinking session that precipitates their ruin. What appears repeatedly as a straightforward attempt by middle-class writers to control the poor must be tempered by the fact that those workers who had succeeded in distinguishing themselves from their community morally or socially were often similarly dismissive of their former companions. Hammerton, indeed, is able to quote his subject's own dismissal of his youthful role in the 1841 Plug Riots as an 'amusing' and foolish act of youth (37). Whether in the religious, self-help or temperance works, it is uncertain whether writers were motivated by genuine social concern or by the desire to quench radical feeling among the working classes. In each case, however, there is a wide expanse between the stated intentions of the work and the result. An attempt to enter the working-class world and depict it from the inside is recurrently superseded by an outsider's controlled and controlling perspective.

Three naturalists from humble life

Three biographies of obscure working-class men – three humble Scottish naturalists - deserve close attention. Samuel Smiles's *Life of a Scotch Naturalist, Thomas Edward, Associate of the Linnean Society* (1876), his *Robert Dick, Baker of Thurso, Geologist and Botanist* (1878) and William Jolly's *The Life of John Duncan, Scotch Weaver and Botanist* (1883) share many of the features of the exemplary works described above, not least because two of them are by the proclaimed leader of self-help literature himself.²³² The exemplary dimension of the works and the virtues they deem praiseworthy are fairly typical. Yet the biographies also stand out: published by major publishing firms (John Murray for the first two, and Kegan Paul, Trench & Co for the third), they are longer, more sophisticated, and more assiduously researched. They aimed for a wider readership and were accordingly reviewed in important periodicals. Though at times repetitive, they make for pleasant reading, and consider the representation of the obscure in interesting ways. Smiles's two biographies were his only attempts at full-length commemorations of 'obscure' men, and therefore present an opportunity to observe how a pre-eminent nineteenth-century biographer took up the challenges posed by such subjects.²³³ Jolly's biography is closely modelled on Smiles's.

Samuel Smiles has already been introduced. Of his fellow biographer, William Jolly, relatively little is known. An Inspector of Schools, he was interested in phrenology and its implications for educational reform. His passion for Scottish history and culture are expressed in his accounts of Burns and Flora Macdonald, and his works are informed by a Romantic appreciation of the Highlands. As President of the Glasgow Ruskin society, founded in 1879, he looked to that writer as a 'Prophet'. Rare surviving letters reveal an impassioned man, as in

²³² Samuel Smiles, *Life of a Scotch Naturalist: Thomas Edward, Associate of the Linnean Society* (London: John Murray, 1876); Samuel Smiles, *Robert Dick, Baker of Thurso, Geologist and Botanist* (London: John Murray, 1878); William Jolly, *The Life of John Duncan, Scotch Weaver and Botanist, with sketches of his friends and notices of the times* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883).

²³³ Smiles's 1891 biography of the French barber-poet Jacques Jasmin could be considered in a similar light, but Jasmin, though poor, was relatively well known.

an invitation to the Edinburgh Professor John Stuart Blackie to join him for a ‘quiet but unique holiday’ in the Hebrides with the prospect of being ‘tossed on the brave billions of the open sea in the light but strong boats of the good fishermen there’.²³⁴

The three biographical subjects followed similar trajectories. Thomas Edward (1814-1886) was a shoemaker who followed his passion for naturalist studies despite raising ten daughters and one son on a weekly salary of 10s. His amateur exhibitions of collected insects and plants did not earn him enough to abandon his profession and consecrate himself to science. Robert Dick (1810/11-1866) specialised in geology and botany and accumulated a large scientific and poetic library despite working as a humble baker in Thurso. He was a regular correspondent of the more famous naturalist Hugh Miller, who had also sprung from humble life. John Duncan (1794-1881) was a Scottish handloom weaver. A turbulent personal life (an illegitimate child himself, he was alienated from his wife following the discovery of her adultery) was compensated through botanical studies and an intense friendship with the fellow botanist Charles Black. Though Robert Dick had died by the time Smiles began his research, John Duncan and Thomas Edwards were celebrated in biographies while they were still alive, and became closely acquainted with their biographers.

Smiles first came across his subjects whilst researching exemplars for *Self-Help*. In the year previous to the work’s publication, Sir Roderick Murchison, Director General of the Geological Society, had described his encounter with the humble scientist, and it caught Smiles’s attention. How Smiles first heard of Edwards is not known, though the frequency of exchanges between educated and humble scientists at this time makes it likely that his encounter of Edwards occurred in similar circumstances. Indeed, William Jolly heard of his future subject John Duncan through Jolly’s friend Charles Black. In all instances, therefore, the encounter between subject and biographer was initially mediated.

²³⁴ William Jolly to Professor John Stuart Blackie, 1875. Professor J. S. Blackie Letters 1873-5. *NLS*. MS. 2631. f. 297.

Scientists made good working-class subjects for many reasons. Firstly, efforts made for the education of working-class men by societies such as the SDUK and publishing houses such as Chambers tended to focus heavily on scientific learning. A sufficient number of working men took up the study of science as a hobby for them to be exceptional enough to work as an exemplar for readers yet common enough to suggest an attainable ideal. Secondly, scientists, though often renowned, did not attract the type of fame that gathered around poets and novelists, so that their activities were more easily reconciled with a life of obscurity. Finally, the study of science itself suggested many interesting parallels with the biographer's discovery of hidden subjects.

All three works reveal how the image of the obscure life serves as a vehicle for examining broader questions on the relationship between the individual and society. At their core lies a tension between the foreign and the familiar and the mediation between the two, as Smiles and Jolly test the validity of fictional, factual and biographical means of bringing a hidden life to the public sphere. Above all, the works are concerned with providing a space for two different social classes to meet. Biography is used as a form of literary tourism that enables readers to encounter, in a safe environment, subjects they would not otherwise have met. The subjects are blank canvases on to which models of social harmony, which do not transgress the class system, are projected.

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The biographers are eager to stress the seriousness of their project. Samuel Johnson is named as an inspiration for Smiles's biography of Thomas Edward; William Jolly draws on Carlyle. A passage from *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) appears before the title page of Jolly's work, and praises

the noble silent men scattered here and there each in his department; whom no Morning Newspaper makes mention of! They are the salt of the earth. A country that has none or few of these is in a bad way.²³⁵

With Carlyle as a presence giving weight to his project, Jolly's preface inscribes the work within a literary tradition paying homage to humble lives. Jolly's biography 'would add another worthy name to the long roll of honourable examples of "the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties"' (vi), and John Duncan is deemed to form 'a noteworthy chapter in "the simple annals of the poor', of plain living, high thinking, and earnest working' (vi). The inverted commas, signifying that the theme was by then well established (and nodding to the educational efforts of G. L. Craik and the SDUK) relies upon both the knowingness of middle-class readers and the desire for self-help of working-class readers. The reference to Thomas Gray's 'Elegy' also plays to both readerships. For Smiles,

the history of the humblest human life is a tale of marvels. Dr. Johnson said that there was not a man in the street whose biography might not be made interesting, provided he could narrate something of his experiences of life, his trials, his difficulties, his successes, and his failures.

I use these words as an introduction to the following biography of my "man in the street" (xxi).

Smiles makes Johnson's statement his own – the idea of the 'man in the street' is not Johnson's phrase (his statement was that 'there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful'²³⁶) but evokes instead Carlyle's 1832 essay 'Biography' in which biography's powers of suggestion are prompted by Johnson's encounter of a prostitute in the street. The move from Johnson's 'useful' to an 'interesting' life temporarily masks the didactic intent of Smiles's biography. In both cases, there is an apparent need for the biographers to claim a higher authority for their project.

George Eliot is a pervasive, unnamed, influence in all three works. The biographers both embraced Eliot's notion of the poetry of everyday life as a means of conferring greater

²³⁵ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 192.

²³⁶ Johnson, 'The dignity and usefulness of biography', pp. 318-23.

interest on their narrative and greater dignity on their subjects. Eliot also provided an important model for the combination of artistic and scientific discourses in a way that resonates with biography. Inspired by Feuerbach and Comte, she reflected on the tasks of the scientist, social scientist and artist in representing individuals in general and the obscure – specifically the working classes – in particular. In her essay ‘The Natural History of German Life’ (1856), she laments the poverty of contemporary artistic and socio-political representations of the working classes. Art and the sciences are envisioned as complementary activities in contributing to the understanding of these communities. (Eliot, of course, frequently used scientific metaphors to describe her artistic endeavours, notably in *Middlemarch*.) Art – ‘a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot’²³⁷ – would engender sympathy, whereas history and social sciences would provide facts and correct sentimental preconceptions. Both overlap in the activity of observation and study.

Smiles envisaged a similar role for biography, which would create a bond of sympathy between subject and public. Yet he was dubious of the value of art, and saw biography as having a very direct and functional exemplary purpose. Jolly is closer to Eliot. He had previously used scientific metaphors as a means of thinking about biography in his short study of Burns, *Burns at Mossgiel, with reminiscences of the Poet by his herd-boy* (1881):

It is a study of the old story in connection with a new and marked personality; a new crystallization of old particles round a fresh and peculiar nucleus, which influences not only the form but the colouring of the aggregate; a new looking at the old sun, with a new object glass, which may reveal somewhat more of its character and constituents.²³⁸

Like Eliot, Jolly was attracted to ideas of perception and perspective, and used a working-class acquaintance of the poet, the herd-boy, to bring a new dimension. The result is both

²³⁷ [George Eliot], ‘The Natural History of German Life’, *WR*, 10 (July 1856), p. 54.

²³⁸ William Jolly, *Robert Burns at Mossgiel, with reminiscences of the Poet by his herd-boy* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1881), prefatory material.

‘study’ and ‘story’ (*Middlemarch*, indeed, was subtitled ‘A Study of Provincial Life’). The biographer is presented as a scientist, trying out a new formula made of disparate elements, but also an artist, assessing the emotional import of his discovery. Eliot’s influence is palpable when, in the biography of John Duncan, Jolly insists upon the ‘need of interpreting to the great majority of mankind, the men and women they daily meet in the house, on the highway, or at the market’ (327). Jolly presents biography as a genre, part science, part art, that can contribute to the understanding of mankind.

All three inspirations, Johnson, Carlyle and Eliot, lend weight to the potentially transgressive act of paying homage to humble subjects in a literary form largely deemed to be reserved for the great and famous. The unimportance of the subjects is affirmed as part of a grand literary project, in which the biographers ennoble the subjects, and themselves in the process, by following such prestigious guidance. Their presence also alerts the reader to the presence of a broader social commentary contained within the narration of simple lives.

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At whom were these exemplars, and the lessons of enthusiasm, hard work and discipline they illustrated, directed? Smiles’s works, foundational texts for self-help societies, were popular gifts for schoolboys but also read by the educated classes (both Ruskin and Eliot, for example, read Smiles). Jolly’s biography grew out of sketches for the scientific journal *Nature* published in 1881 but also the educational *Leaders of Men: a Book of Biographies specially written for youth* (1880) by his friend H. A. Page. In fact, both biographers aimed for an audience that transgressed age and class boundaries. This could be problematic. *Life of a Scotch Naturalist* was handsomely illustrated and bound, and a popular edition was issued later. Thomas Edward was faced with the awkward situation of barely being able to afford his own biography. He wrote to Smiles that ‘on reconsideration, and seeing that the price is high, I now think one will do for us all here and if any of my daughters

who are married want [a] copy let their husband buy one'.²³⁹ One reviewer noted the juxtaposition of dense scientific reflections with more simplifying episodes, and wondered 'for what class of readers the book is intended'.²⁴⁰ Prophet-like, William Jolly attempts to smooth over such potential incongruence and differences of readership by addressing the 'nation', rich and poor: 'To some of these elements it may be well and wise for us, as a nation, once more to return' (29).

The presentation of the subjects is calculated to appeal to both working-class and more educated readers. Smiles analyses the origins of Edward's scientific passion in terms evocative of genius:

He said, "I suppose it must have originated in the same internal impulse which prompted me to catch those flies in the window. This unseen something – this double being, or call it what you will – inherent in us all, whether used for good or evil, which stimulated the unconscious babe to get at, no doubt, the first living animals he had ever seen, at length grew in the man into an irresistible and unconquerable passion, and engendered in him an insatiable longing for, and earnest desire to be always amongst such things [...]" (4).

This account, presented as autobiographical, was taken from an account that Edward had sent Smiles. Edward's original words are tellingly different:

And I believe it will be found to proceed from the selfsame quarter from which the impulse emanated that prompted me when only about four months old to leap from my mothers' arms in the vain endeavour to get at some flies creeping on a window near to which she stood and which would in all probability have proved fatal had it not been for my long dress to which she clutched and thereby saved me from falling to the ground. It is this that made me a Naturalist. This unseen, yet never the less present, something which stimulated the unconscious babe to get at no doubt the first living animals it had ever seen which has grown in the man into an irresistable [sic] and unconquerable passion and has goaded him on whether he would or would not and which has engendered in him an insatiable craving to be ever amongst Nature's handworks [sic].²⁴¹

Smiles is less interested in Edward's self-dramatising account than in the fumbings of the unconscious. His anecdote is secularised, and privileges a Romantic account of inspiration.

²³⁹ Thomas Edward to Samuel Smiles, 13th November 1876. *British Library*, Correspondence and papers of and concerning Thomas Edward. MSS. Add. 71084-6. Hereafter referred to as Thomas Edward, *BL*, MSS.

²⁴⁰ [Unsigned], 'Robert Dick, Baker of Thurso', *The Athenaeum*, no. 2671 (1879), p. 15.

²⁴¹ Thomas Edward's Narrative of His Life. *BL*, MS. Add. 71084, pp. 151-2.

To Edward's suggestion that his talents would 'be found to *proceed* from the selfsame quarter from which the *impulse* emanated', Smiles substitutes the words that 'it must have *originated* in the same *internal* impulse which prompted' him [my italics]. Such terms provide a stronger accent on Romantic childhood impressions than the more methodical 'proceed'. The passion is stronger in Smiles's version: the frustrated attempt to catch flies is fulfilled. The 'double being', which echoes the Romantic doppelgänger, is the biographer's addition, as is the 'earnest' desire, that most Victorian indicator of sincerity. Smiles makes the passage a metaphor of the human condition ('inherent in us all'), raised to the grander level of 'good or evil'. He sets the scene for an aetiology of genius which runs through the biography and overlaps with a more socially aware narrative in which questions of education, religion and work are used to interpret Edward. The tension is mirrored in the style that sets Romantic inspiration against the social consciousness of Victorian realism, whilst tropes of Romantic autobiography are being layered on to the conventions of Victorian exemplary biography. Individuality, not 'the common', is being privileged.

Indeed, these biographies work against the twentieth-century critical consensus that working-class writing tends to privilege the communal over the individual. John Burnett, for example, introduces his survey of Victorian working-class autobiographies *Annals of Labour* by stating that 'personal relationships' were what mattered most to them (17). The absence of nineteenth-century biographies (unlike autobiographies) by and about working-class subjects makes it difficult to determine whether such a work would have followed an entirely different model from Smiles's or Jolly's, who largely ignore the gritty day-to-day realities of a nineteenth-century working-class life and the ideal of an interdependent working-class community.

Instead, the reader is presented with a narrative that favours individual achievement and self-fulfilment in a manner which combines Romantic ideas of the self's solitary

relationship with nature with a more specifically Victorian account of self-development. Edward, Dick and Duncan are subjects who would usually have been given a brief notice in a work of collective biography – as indeed the first two were in Smiles's own *Self-Help*, and as Duncan was in a sketch by Jolly in *Nature*. The act of making them the focus of a single-subject biography is in itself unusual, and isolates them from their community. Both Duncan and Edward are compared to 'Wordsworth's Wanderer' (407; 91). William Jolly, more than Smiles, was interested in Duncan's community. Yet here again the friendships, and in particular Duncan's relationship with his closest friend, Charles Black, are recounted in heightened language:

In his silent, self-contained, and comparatively solitary existence, this union with one man [...] to whom he tendered the worship of his deepest heart, was [...] dearer and better to him than wife and child. [...] All this reads like a bit of old romance or a passage from a modern novel, though it was but the literal truth. It recalls, at least, in no mean degree, the world-famous friendships between men celebrated in history and poetry (491).

The combination of solitary genius and intense male friendship carries Romantic overtones, as does the language that Jolly uses throughout to depict the friendship ('a momentary lightning flash', a 'beatific effect', 491). Despite the passage's brief distancing of the 'literal truth' from fiction ('old romance'), Jolly reaffirms the relationship between reality and fiction by emphasising the friendship's similarity to fictional models and placing the words 'history and poetry' on a level ground. Once again, a working-class life that might have alienated the more educated, middle-class readers is depicted in appealing terms that had more relevance for them. Above all, it insists that both the community and the individual can be served.

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The isolating, even alienating, effect of biography is mirrored within the works. Jolly creates a *mise-en-abîme* of the public gaze. The biography is saturated with imagery of sight and perception. In chapter 3, Duncan moves into Drumlithie for his work:

the thin, shy, uncouth-looking, friendless hero of our story entered the village early one morning at the beginning of the century [...]. As he passed along the narrow street to the upper end of the village [...] he could observe through his sheepish eyes, under the projecting brows – which saw deeper and farther, however, than the casual observer might suspect – that numerous groups of weavers eyed him from the corners of the streets [...]. His lank, ill-filled figure, his awkward stoop that bespoke bashfulness and toil [...] did not escape their critical gaze; and the question went quickly round who this “queer kind o’ creatur” could be [...] (26).

The subject, who up until that point had been ‘John’ or ‘Johnnie’, becomes anonymous again, as a means of expressing his lonely condition. By labelling him as the hero of ‘our story’, Jolly encourages the reader to side with him as he ventures down the foreign street. As Duncan enters Drumlithie, he looks out at the crowd, and the gazed and the gazers suddenly meet. The perspective then shifts to the observers, and we see John through their eyes and dwell on his awkwardness. The reader has the alternative perspectives of the alienated subject, the sympathetic biographer, and the ‘critical’ neighbours. He is warned against being a ‘casual observer’ – or superficial reader, and shown how a change in perspective can transmute an individual from a foreign to a familiar figure.

The idea of submitting the hidden life to public scrutiny is again re-enacted within the work, with renewed descriptions of Duncan walking through towns, alone or accompanied by his embarrassed friend. John Duncan drew ‘all eyes even in the city crowd’, ‘ogling glances’, ‘constant stares’, he and his friend ‘sallied forth into the public gaze’, ‘under the gaze of all folks’, and they were again ‘ogled at’ (359-63). What is striking is that Duncan does not return the gaze, play up to it, or enjoy it, nor is he altered by it. This both confirms his worth (unlike that of his embarrassed friend, who acts as a useful point of comparison) and reassures the reader that bringing the biographical subject out of darkness and into the light will not pervert him. Significantly, this ‘public gaze’ is depicted in a predominantly negative manner. It is a superficial gaze, which does not look beneath the surface. Paradoxically, it is not the oblivious hidden man who is blind, but his audience. The unquestioning crowd ‘shuts their

eyes' to what surrounds them daily, and are 'blind' to common objects. Men such as Duncan have been 'viewed in a false light' due to the crowd's inability to 'look beneath the mere outer surface of things' (326-7).

It is here that the biographer intervenes. Jolly senses 'the urgent need that exists of having the things of everyday life interpreted to the mass of men' (327). Biography is aligned with science, education, religion and poetry as one of several mediums capable of thus reconciling society. The biographer requires a revaluation of the public gaze, and the objects that it deems worthy of attention. For Jolly, Duncan is 'having his life interpreted to the world in a book' (328). By never having achieved real fame and threatened the social status quo, these biographical subjects occupy a liminal space that enables a safe exploration of social and individual duties, with the biographer as a mediator, a conduit through which unusual social encounters can be made.

Smiles also finds a way to include the reader within the biography. In *Life of a Scotch Naturalist*, Smiles depicts the range of visitors who passed through Edward's failed scientific exhibition in Aberdeen. First introduced are those interested in profiting financially from their encounter with the naturalist ('stuffed-bird sellers, and persons who pestered him to buy nearly everything of a bestial kind, alive or dead', 158). The second group are the self-interested leisured classes, who make no effort to treat Edward's work with attention ('Several ladies called upon Edward to consult him about their favourite pets', 158). The working classes are dubious at his achievements yet admiring ('They were working men themselves, and knew what they had to contend with, in the form [...] difficulties of all sorts', 166). An anonymous visitor proves the only visitor genuinely interested in both man and work. These are all Smiles's potential readers: working-class readers looking for exemplars, educated scientists and the curious middle classes. The attitude of each is examined, which allows Smiles to make an implicit plea to the reader to accord genuine attention to the subject

and his biography, which is not to be read as a manual for success or to be glanced over superficially but scrutinised carefully. The fact that the respectful, insightful visitor is kept anonymous provides a space for the reader to project himself. Again, the biographer teaches the reader how to read the work, and how to be a good member of the public. One reward for this effort is that the reader too becomes endowed with a stronger sense of individuality, and can find a means to escape from the crowd, the superficial masses. He becomes a more enlightened tourist.

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The gaze of the outsider is linked to the notion of the picturesque. The words ‘picturesque’ and ‘romantic’, and their pictorial and literary embodiments, form a central part of the three biographies. Thomas Edward explored the ‘picturesque’ Dens (134); a ‘picturesque’ (200) landscape surrounds Robert Dick; Duncan was born near ‘picturesque ruins’ (1). Ruskin, much admired by Jolly, influentially associated the picturesque with the sublime, and with an attraction to the angular, the rugged, the asymmetrical in landscapes and art (especially mountains). Intricate detail was intended to stimulate the imagination. The three naturalists, who lived their lives amongst the picturesque landscapes, might have seemed equally ‘rough’ and ‘untamed’.

In the biographies, the ‘picturesque’ often gains the connotation of quaintness. The definitions coexist in the appropriation of the ‘picturesque’ by the burgeoning tourism industry, at least since William Gilpin wrote popular guidebooks in the late eighteenth century, aimed at the growing middle classes. (The word ‘tourist’, curiously, appeared almost simultaneously with the word ‘biography’, in the late eighteenth century.) Smiles’s publisher, John Murray, wrote and published tourism handbooks, including a handbook to Scotland. This tourism of the ‘picturesque’ is echoed in these three biographies. In *Life of a Scotch*

Naturalist, Smiles, like Murray, inserts maps of the areas covered by Edward with guidebook-style advice on interesting sights:

The scenery in this neighbourhood can scarcely be equalled, even in Switzerland, though it is at present entirely unknown. [...] The Banffshire side of Ben Macdhui forms a magnificent precipice at 1500 feet [...] (137).

The textbook style, the marshalling of facts, and the allusion to tourists who may have visited Switzerland envision a middle-class reader. The obscure state of the landscape ('comparatively unknown') parallels the interest afforded by the equally obscure biographical subject. As James Buzard argues of Victorian tourists, when 'valued signs [...] gathered from books, pictures, conversation, and other means of cultural preparation matched with scenes before them – they could feel they had achieved meaningful contact with what these places essentially were.'²⁴² Strikingly, Smiles's description of the Ochil Hills in *Robert Dick* is integrated into a picture of the hills, the layout of the text imitating the cascading water as if the text itself had become the picturesque landscape, a place to roam around in [Fig. 9]. (The opening of Jolly's *John Duncan* closely imitates the guide-book style opening of *Robert Dick*.) The three works also include lexicons to the subjects' Scottish dialects, as the reader is given translations and pronunciation guides in footnotes ('*Cruive*, a pigstye', *SN*, 5; 'Tough: 'pronounced *Tooch*, with the guttural *ch*', *JD*, 124). (In Smiles's case, Edward had to explain the words first by letter.) The figure of the biographer as cultural mediator emerges once more.

²⁴² James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture', 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1993), p. 10.

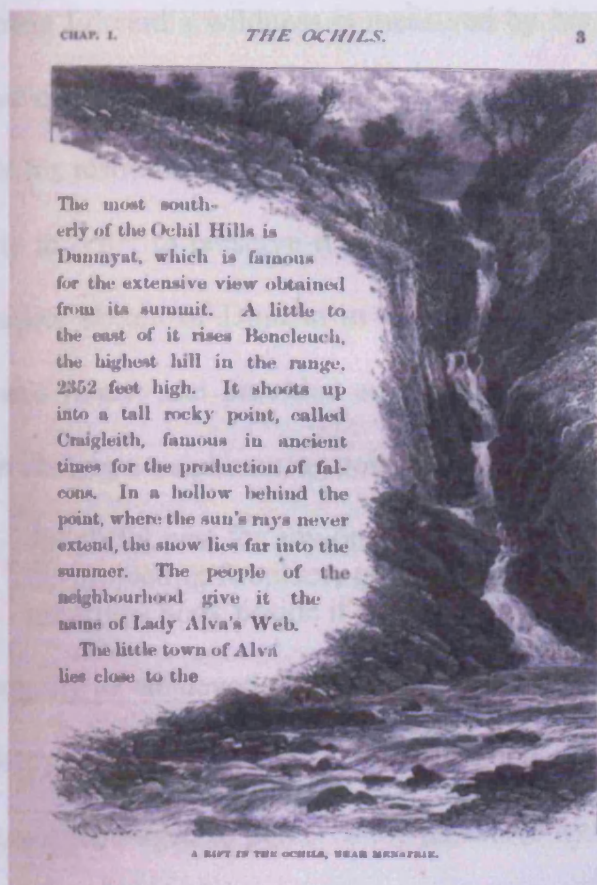


Fig. 9. 'A Rift in the Ochils, Near Menstrie',
Robert Dick, p. 3

This style reminiscent of a guidebook is extended through the manner in which the biographers invite the reader into the subject's home, that source of fascination to many Victorians. To be given a 'peep at the home'²⁴³ was one of the biographer's privileges, and delighted readers, who poured over works such as William Howitt's *Homes and Haunts of Eminent Poets* (1847). One writer, in an essay on 'Labourers' Homes' (1860), declared the traditional rural English cottage to be 'the delight and envy of the traveller, the theme of the journalist and the poet' and the 'American tourist'.²⁴⁴ The rustic's home, strikingly, becomes 'picturesque' through the approval of a leisured, educated class. Smiles and Jolly use the home as a site of compromise between the familiar and the strange in a manner that reflects

²⁴³ William Jolly, in Joseph Gutteridge, *Lights and Shadow in the Life of an Artisan: with preface by W. Jolly* (Coventry: Curtis and Beamish, 1893), chapter 10.

²⁴⁴ [Unsigned], 'Labourers' Homes', *QR*, 107 (January-April 1860), p. 268.

the nature of the biographical subjects themselves. In *Life of a Scotch Naturalist*, the extent of the young Edward's wildness is measured by his parents' inability to keep him homebound. In later chapters, home is an abstract space to which Edward returns after his journeys to rebuild his resources. Smiles avoids giving detailed descriptions of the home and its shocking poverty in order to preserve it as a site of civilising influence. Jolly is far more informative. His earlier sketch of Duncan in *Good Words* focused entirely on the biographer's visit to Duncan's home, and provided an illustration of it. In the full-length biography, Duncan is shown visiting a neighbouring cottage, a

delightful nest for any one to retreat to, after the chilling toils of a winter day, with its far-projecting fireplace, great open-armed chimney inviting to kindly warmth, and the luxurious nook beside it with its comfortable seat (243).

A harmony is achieved between home and nature through the word 'nest'. Luxury and simplicity ('kindly', 'nook', 'comfortable') are shown to coexist happily, and the reader ('any one'), is encouraged to perceive the pleasures lurking in humble dwellings. The odd, foreign-seeming subjects are made to appear reassuring and familiar.

The picturesque was of course above all an artistic mode. Reviewers admired the illustrations accompanying Smiles's *Life of a Scotch Naturalist*. The landscapes were drawn by George Reid, a Scottish realist painter who, as Anne Secord notes, 'sought beauty and truth in the commonplace'.²⁴⁵ Reid entered into as close a relationship with Edward as Smiles himself, visiting the region and sending Edward gifts. The pictures, typically landscapes or village scenes, portray undisturbed nature in which the presence of mankind is recalled, by a distant church steeple (1) or smoke from factory chimneys (42), which signals the tension between the wild and the homely, the foreign and the known. By constantly drawing back from the text and focusing on a single scene, the reader is made to switch continuously

²⁴⁵ Anne Secord, "'Be what you would seem to be': Samuel Smiles and Thomas Edward, and the making of a working-class scientific hero", *SC*, 16 (2003), p. 150.

between the wild expanse of nature described by Smiles, and the framed space drawing attention to its own picturesqueness – in the word's sense as the 'fitness to make a picture'.²⁴⁶

Though William Jolly did not illustrate his biography, the pictorial remains a strong presence throughout the work as moments are isolated and contemplated as painted scenes. In chapter 5, the young Duncan receives reading lessons from Mary Brand, a twelve-year-old friend. Jolly steps back and observes:

John with the book close to his eyes, laboriously and earnestly groping his way through the page under bright guidance; while many a merry laugh rang through the room at the errors made by the slow, sober, diligent, and short-sighted scholar. The two formed a striking picture for a character painter, as they sat there [...] with the light streaming in upon them through the near window, under the thatched roof open to the rigging, which was hung with the cobwebs and the accumulated stour and dust of years (40-1).

John's near-sightedness suggests an unselfconscious absorption in his task, a natural pose in which the painter, and biographer, could catch him unawares. The idea of the subject unaware of being observed also echoes the broader idea of the biographer choosing an obscure subject.

The picturesque movement sparked debates on the relative values of the authentic and the doctored. As painters became more extreme in their creation of 'the natural', demolishing buildings and carefully dishevelled beggars, their faithfulness to nature was questioned. Similar criticism was levelled at tourists, as their search for 'authenticity' prompted pre-packaged tours. In volume four of *Modern Painters* (1856) Ruskin encouraged painters with little 'inventive power' to concentrate on factual reproductions (which echoes the biographer's scholarly role), whilst the 'inventive' artist could present a more subjective 'impression' (which mirrors a more Romantic conception of biography).²⁴⁷ The inclusion of the subject's portrait prompted similar reflections. Edward, who believed that 'the pictures (sic) half the story' (*BL MS.*, 19th April 1875), was eager to have his portrait included and sent his own photographs to Smiles. Keen on accuracy, Edward pointed out discrepancies

²⁴⁶ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (London, 1987), p. 57.

²⁴⁷ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters: Volume IV: Of Mountain Beauty* (London: George Allen, 1897), pp. 19-21.

between reality and the photograph, and precipitately wrote that ‘I forgot to mention in my last that the hair on the top of my head in both the larger photos is too white’ (BL MS., 22nd April 1875). Unknown to Edward, Smiles wanted an engraving that was more ‘artistic’ than ‘factual’. Smiles warned Reid that Edward ‘wants a little brushing up before he gets his face painted,’ and Reid asked the engraver, Paul Rajon, to accentuate Edward’s pock marks. Impressionism won over realism, and Smiles declared that the finished portrait was ‘the man himself’.²⁴⁸ When George Reid presented his picture *Puir Tam the Cobbler* at the Scottish Academy, it was sensationally popular.

Jolly, a more self-conscious writer than Smiles, includes *within* the biography a similar sequence of events, making the debate over representation part of the work itself, when Charles Black desires a photograph of his friend:

Charles had enjoined his brother to have John taken in his usual attire and style, with umbrella and bundle, as he used to see him in the old days at Whitehouse, so as to get as far as possible a realistic and speaking memento of the dear old man. [...] But he did not bring the big blue “tent;” and, in the wish to appear as genteel as possible on such an important occasion [...] (366).

Unlike the scenes where the subject is taken off-guard, John resists this focus, and cannot reconcile the ‘realistic’ John with his framed self. The scene which follows is an uncomfortable one, in which the suspicious John is handed various props in order to make him look as eccentric as he commonly did, a ‘symbolic’ John rather than the man as he appeared for the photograph. In the case of both Smiles and Jolly, the achievement of a visual recreation of the ‘real’ subject has been achieved at the expense of a degree of doctoring.

[Figs. 10-12]

²⁴⁸ Correspondence between Reid and Smiles, quoted in Secord, ““Be what you would seem to be””, pp. 150-1.



Fig. 9. 'Thomas Edward, A. L. S.',
Engraved by Charles Roberts, after a Drawing by George
Reid, R. S. A.,
Life of a Scotch Naturalist.

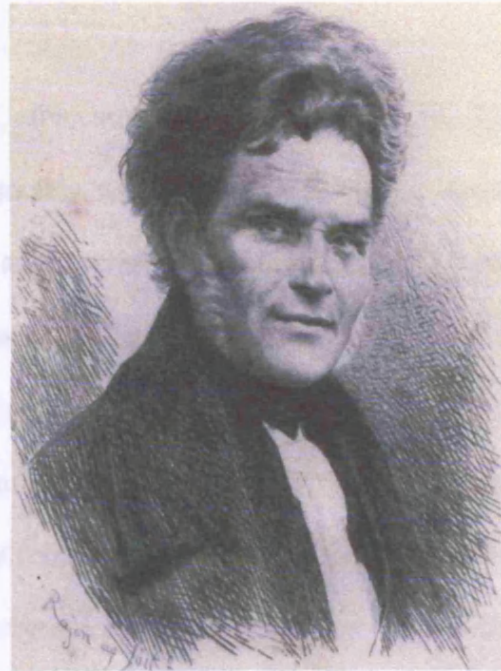


Fig. 10. 'Robert Dick', Etching by Paul Rajon,
Robert Dick.



Fig. 11. 'John Duncan, in his 72nd Year', Artist unknown, *John Duncan, Weaver and Botanist.*

*

Both biographers avoid being accused of advocating social advancement, by reassuring middle-class readers that their position in society will not be usurped. They insist that the amateur scientists were content to follow an ‘interesting hobby’ (SN, 384) and possessed ‘simple tastes’ (JD, 501). The working-class naturalists are set apart from drunken and politically radical working-class men. They do not neglect their professions – shoemaker, baker, weaver – for their passion. These professions are superficially described. As in many social problem novels of the 1840s, it is suggested that most of the hardships that the subjects bore in their work, and from which they escaped to embrace natural studies, were caused by cruel and tyrannical masters who ‘raved and swore’ (SN, 56) or had fits of ‘rage’ (JD, 31), rather than bad government, policies or laws. The fact that the biographers are narrating events that occurred at least half a century earlier means that past working conditions can be lamented without any accompanying calls for reform or change.

This makes the subjects safe vehicles for cultural exchange. The biographers are fascinated by moments of contact between the working-class scientists and their gentlemen counterparts. Job Legh, in *Mary Barton*, is representative of the harmonising working-class scientist. The unworldly appearance of his home, compared to a wizard’s dwelling (vol. 1, chapter 4), signals his ability to transgress the gritty world in which he lives. At the end of the novel, it is Job who acts as the mediator between the masters and the workers. Such men have fluid social roles without being transgressive. Social intercourse, and even friendships, across class barriers were not implausible. Trading specimens became a common means of exchange between the lower, middle and upper classes. One reviewer for *The Times* described amateur science as the most ‘effective means of obliterating the asperities of class distinctions’.²⁴⁹ Indeed, Lynn Barber has described in *The Heyday of Natural History* the craze for amateur

²⁴⁹ [Unsigned], ‘A Weaver and Botanist’, *The Times*, 30785 (April 4, 1883), p. 5.

naturalism, an activity that was recommended ‘for artisans, for aristocrats, for country-dwellers, for town-dwellers, for ladies, for children, for old people’.²⁵⁰ It was a healthy occupation that could be harmlessly shared by different social classes.

Smiles registers this excitement. He recounts at great length an episode in Edward’s life in which an anonymous gentleman, ‘among his better-class visitors’, made repeated visits to Edward’s Aberdeen exhibition. In *Robert Dick*, a scene in which Robert explains local geology to Sir Roderick Murchison is drawn out:

Taking up a few handfuls of flour, and spreading it out on the baking board, Dick proceeded to mould a model in relief of the geological structure of Caithness. [...] To quote the words of Sir Roderick Murchison, “Mr Robert Dick directed my notice to the presence of numerous powerful fractures and dislocations [...]”. Mr. Peach [...] says: “I felt it to be a great privilege to be present at the meeting of the baronet and Dick in the bakehouse.” (272).

Three perspectives are given. The first, the biographer’s, defines ‘Dick’ as a worker, with his trade’s tools (flour); the second is the scientist’s, where Dick becomes ‘Mr Robert Dick’ the geologist, whose specialised language implies expertise. A third witness underscores the pleasing incongruity: the subject is again ‘Dick in the bakehouse’, and Sir Roderick becomes, impressively, the ‘baronet’. The scene is the biography’s centrepiece, announced in the preface (vi), and picked up by reviewers: one, Rudler, exclaimed, ‘A strange meeting that, between the baronet and the baker!’²⁵¹ Such exchanges occurred before the professionalization of science, when gentlemen and workers shared an ‘amateur’ status. There is an element of self-congratulation in belonging to an epoch that witnessed this mobility. Nevertheless, Smiles’s insistence on these moments of contact and the fact that such juxtapositions are constantly pointed to in biographical prefaces suggests that real class transgressions were sufficiently rare to be exciting. The working-class scientist can embody an image of social progression without ever leaving his class.

²⁵⁰ Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870* (London, 1980), p. 17.

²⁵¹ F.W. Rudler, ‘Robert Dick, Baker, of Thurso; Geologist and Botanist’, *Academy*, 343 (1878), p. 511.

The most striking exchange in all three works, however, is between the subjects and the Queen, with the biographer as mediator. As John Duncan sank into pauperism, William Jolly appealed for public help through a sketch of his life and work. 'Her Majesty sent "the poor man" a donation of £10, as having been "interested in his story and work"' (425).

Duncan

was especially and proudly grateful for the Queen's gift, as presented to a poor, hidden man like him! To raise his spirits, I suggested the possibility of Her Majesty visiting him, as she had done others, not being very far distant while staying over the hill at Balmoral. [...] "Half a dizen years syne, I cu'd hae held discourse wi' her! But noo, noo it's ower late; it canna be!" Then, after a pause of sadness, he continued, with growing earnestness, "Ah, but she's a nice 'umman, a very hyoom'le 'umman, and has aye been sae, I believe. God bless 'er!'" (446-7).

The passage plays with ideas of distance and closeness. The subject's broad vernacular appears to increase the separation between the two. Yet this leads to an odd reversal. The word 'hyoom'le', which Jolly explains in a footnote as meaning 'Humble, meaning that she did not stand upon her elevated rank in her intercourse with her subjects', and the use of the word 'woman', plays with the illusion of a natural, unhindered exchange between the 'hidden man' and the Queen. In Smiles's biographies, the queen's gifts are also alluded to. Robert Dick died before it could be bestowed (415). Edward, more fortunate, was granted a pension of fifty pounds per year. Lord Beaconsfield wrote to Edward, in 1876, that 'the Queen has been much interested in reading your Biography by Mr. Smiles, and is touched by your successful pursuit of natural science under all the cares of daily toil' (vii). This attention is proudly recounted at length in the prefaces of later editions.

The fairy-tale dimension of such encounters was picked up by *Punch* with a cartoon by Linley Sambourne depicting Queen Victoria's post-biography visit to Edward's home [Fig. 12]. The cartoon plays with the idea of frames and containment. Queen and shoemaker



Fig. 12. Edward Linley Sambourne, 'Thomas Edward, Naturalist and Cobbler',
Punch (February 3, 1877), p. 38.

are united within the wreath inside the worker's home. They are framed just as the birds, beasts and fish are around them. The resentful Banff population is depicted inside the doorframe. The intrusion of outsiders threatens the exchange, just as the harmony of the wreath is threatened by escaping insects and butterflies. The picture depicts a riot of signs and conveys simultaneously the attraction of the scene and its precarious nature. It is not surprising that the first sentence of both Smiles's *Scotch Naturalist* and Jolly's *John Duncan* describes the biography as a 'tale' ('a tale of marvels', *SN*, v; 'the simple tale', *JD*, v). Rather than an exemplary narrative in which the reader seeks to imitate the virtues of a hard-working scientist, these are narratives in which the parish pauper is paid royal tribute. The

juxtaposition of royalty and pauperism suggests that the obscure biographical subjects provide a space in which social fantasies can be played out.

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This idea of the obscure subject as empty space both encouraged and restricted biographical investigation. The biographers faced the challenge of constructing a life out of very little material. There is a moving impression in all three works of a life in tenuous balance between remembrance and oblivion, as acquaintances pass away. Smiles noted in the preface to Edward's life that 'if the book had not been written now, it is probable that it never would have been written' (xxv). The biographers had sparse materials to work with, and their success must be tempered. Smiles and Jolly padded out these lives to bursting point – Smiles by rehearsing similar anecdotes, and Jolly through extended depictions of Duncan's acquaintances - in the strain of making a biography from a hidden life.

Yet the biographers benefited, except in Robert Dick's case, from a relationship with a living subject whom they visited and corresponded with. This did not remove all obstacles. Upon applying to Edward for his articles, he received the reply that 'on looking over my stock, I find that a great many have disappeared. [...] The most of what I wrote in the local papers is lost, for ever lost' (205). Smiles notes that 'he never had the least idea that old letters could be useful' (295). William Jolly also draws attention to his sources ('His copy-book now lies before me, as then written by him in August, 1830', 83), announces his dependence on those who 'have freely and kindly supplied materials for this history' (vi), and conducts interviews ('The Rev. Mr Smith, his pastor during that time, in writing to the author, regrets that his now failing memory makes it impossible for him to recall any details of his intercourse with the man', 220). The work vividly captures the process of uncovering an obscure life.

The preservation of Edward's letters to Smiles provides a rare opportunity to see the biographer at work. Smiles and Jolly were by no means rare in taking liberties with their sources; the obscurity of their subjects, however, meant that there was less likelihood of their ever being corrected. As one essayist noted, for the lesser genius 'there is not much hope of rehabilitation'.²⁵² Smiles writes in his autobiography that Edward 'was not very expert at writing out his thoughts',²⁵³ and is extremely frank about his role:

I took up his tale, and made his case my own. I gathered together his random articles, and retold his stories afresh, and, I think, with increased interest. I imparted to them that which Edward did not possess, and which I did – some literary art (350-1).

One early episode, in which Edward's schoolmaster falsely accuses Edward of having brought in a centipede, thrashes and expels him, is representative of Smiles's interventions. Edward began and ended his version of events by insisting on his innocence ('as mistaken an accusation as ever was laid at any one's charge'; 'I did not take that centipede there'). Smiles's version places more strength on the boy's impressions rather than the older man's recollections by withholding the assertion of innocence until the conclusion. Edward's narration is again rearranged when Smiles displaces Edward's vivid description of his schoolmaster's nose from the conclusion, as an afterthought, to the core of the scene. Edward wrote:

This individual had a rather reddish nose and a pair of pimples on his face of the same hue and whenever he got into a rage as he often did it was observed that the protuberance got much brighter. On this occasion, I believe, for I did not notice this fact myself, this ornament grew ten times redder. Some of the boys liken the pimples to drops of blood (Thomas Edward's Narrative of His Life, *BL*, MSS.)

Smiles writes:

The master had a reddish nose, and a number of pimples on his face, which were of the same hue. When he got into a rage, it was observed that the protuberances became much brighter. On this occasion the organ became ten times redder than before. It was

²⁵² [Unsigned], 'Studies in Biography', *FM*, 596 (1879), p. 256.

²⁵³ Samuel Smiles, *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, LL.D* (London, 1905), p. 305. Smiles gives insufficient credit to Edward, whose writing is vivid and compelling.

like Bardolph's lantern in the poop. Some of the boys likened his pimples to large dribblets of blood (36).

The passage is magnified: the nose is not 'rather' reddish but decidedly reddish, the 'pair' of pimples become 'a number', and the 'drops' of blood become 'large dribblets'. The reference to Bardolph creates a distinctly more 'literary' scene, and relies on the reader being well versed in Shakespeare (Edward was not). Whereas Edward had relied on hearsay for the description, Smiles implies that it was observed by the boy, in a Dickensian moment of childish terror at grotesque adults. The master, built up as a far more impressive figure, stirs the reader's revulsion during rather than after the scene. Here, as in the biography as a whole, Smiles forges a more vivid, 'literary' life from raw materials. There is no suggestion on the biographer's part that such alterations might betray the subject or biographical standards. It is taken for granted that the subject needs the biographer's more sophisticated intervention.

The biographers were anything but unobtrusive. They catapulted the subjects into the public sphere (and, indeed, the *DNB*). The works were preceded and accompanied by campaigns for funds, and influential figures such as Darwin joined the Queen in aiding the impoverished naturalists. Jolly made several appeals in the journal *Nature*, where he stated that 'it is devoutly to be hoped that such a man will not be allowed to go down to his grave dishonoured and neglected'.²⁵⁴ An address was provided for subscriptions. Readers were regularly updated on the amount collected, and, two days after Duncan's death, it was announced that 'a memoir of the old man is now being written by Mr. Jolly, and will be anticipated with interest'.²⁵⁵ Whether a brilliant marketing strategy or genuine philanthropy, Jolly's canvassing for his subject adds a new dimension to the mediation between public and

²⁵⁴ William Jolly, 'John Duncan: the Alford Weaver and Botanist', *Nature*, 23 (January 20, 1881), p. 70.

²⁵⁵ [Unsigned], 'Notes', *Nature*, 24 (1881), p. 361.

private, the audience and the subject. He intervened directly on behalf of the man, but also on behalf of the biographical subject.

For Thomas Edward and John Duncan, the sudden influx of money following their biographer's intervention must have felt little short of a divine intervention. This ability of the writer to have such an influence on the subject's life could not have occurred with more public lives and points to the issues of control lurking beneath the biography's creation and repercussions. For Jolly, the raising of a contented, self-satisfied working-man to a condition of fame and relative fortune seems to contravene his insistence on the rejection of superficiality and ambition. The contradiction is partly explained if the biographer is perceived as a godlike figure distributing their just rewards to the meek and noble, granting them a kind of eternal life in literary form. Jolly talks of the work as a 'compensation' (348) for hardships endured. It is certainly significant that many of the more religious biographies used biblical quotations on the meek inheriting the earth as their justification for choosing obscure subjects.

The case of Thomas Edward is an intriguing example of the power struggles that could take place between biographer and subject. Thomas Edward experienced Smiles's disruptive appearance into his life with both excitement and unease. Neither did Smiles take to Edward without reserve. In the biography, Smiles smoothes over the more stubborn facets of his subject's character, notably Edward's more vociferous complaints about his lack of rewards that are such a recurrent feature of his letters. The letters that Edward sent his biographer paint a moving picture in which the subject is eager to witness his accession to posterity but fears losing control of his life. Edward frequently provided information before telling Smiles 'It is you and you alone who must judge of these things'.²⁵⁶ Once the biography

²⁵⁶ TE to SS, 12th January 1876, *BL MSS*.

was published, however, Edward reacted by sending Smiles an extensive list of errors that ought to be corrected.²⁵⁷

Having realised the measure of his success, Edward began to fight for control of his life and decided to publish his own material, both autobiographical and scientific. Publishers, dubious, felt that the life-narrative was only acceptable with the mediation of a professional, recognised biographer. Edward sent a collection of his letters to David Douglas, editor of the *North British Review*, for publication and advice. Douglas thought the letters too personal, tried to dissuade him, and argued that ‘should any money come to you out of the sales it would be at the expense of your well won reputation’.²⁵⁸ Edward complained to Douglas that ‘the facts stated have nothing at all to do with Mr Smiles neither do I wish them to have’.²⁵⁹ Smiles was horrified at Edward’s sudden burst of independence, and exerted himself to prevent Edward from publishing in his own right. Hasty communications passed between Douglas, George Reid and Smiles, in which they express the ‘bother’ of the whole affair.²⁶⁰ In 1878, Edward complained to David Douglas that ‘Mr S. has no claim on me. It would surely therefore be very hard if I could not make public anything more merely because Mr S has done something in that way’.²⁶¹ A little later, he insists that ‘I do not see that I have, or am intending to trespass on the rights of any’.²⁶² Smiles’s niece and biographer, Aileen Smiles, later wrote that Edward became ‘a little saucy’.²⁶³ Lynn Barber, in her account of Victorian natural science, describes him as ‘repellent’.²⁶⁴ This is unfair. The subjects could not have been prepared for the paradox that Smiles and Jolly made a bid for the importance of their subject whilst claiming that their value lay in patient obscurity.

²⁵⁷ TE to SS, 4th and 6th December 1876. *BL*. MSS.

²⁵⁸ David Douglas to TE, 7th March 1878. *NLS*. MS. 1661.

²⁵⁹ TE to David Douglas, 12th April 1878. *NLS*. MS. 1661.

²⁶⁰ George Reid to David Douglas, 15th April 1878. *NLS*. MS. 1661.

²⁶¹ TE to David Douglas, 17th April 1878. *NLS*. MS. 1661.

²⁶² TE to David Douglas, 22nd April 1878. *NLS*. MS. 1661.

²⁶³ Aileen Smiles, *Samuel Smiles and His Surroundings* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1956), p. 136.

²⁶⁴ Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History*, p. 34.

Smiles and Jolly signalled their control over the subject by writing chapters updating events since their first publication. Jolly's biography was an extended version of this, whilst Smiles traced the evolution of Edward's post-publication success in a new preface to an 1882 edition, completing the life in an 1889 edition of the work with a notice of Edward's death which opens with the line 'it remains to be added that Mr. Thomas Edward, A.L.S., died on the 27th April 1886, at the age of seventy-two'.²⁶⁵ For Smiles and Jolly the life had become the property of the biographer. As the 'discoverers' of an obscure and interesting specimen of working-class life, they had taken control of the subject. This evolution suggests the extent to which biographies of working men were carefully managed and the emphasis that was placed on a mediation between the obscure workers and the reading public. The works offer themselves up as a space for the projection of social experiments in communication, and possess all the charm and transience of a fantasy.

Frederick Martin's *The Life of John Clare* (1865) and biographies of 'uneducated' poets

Amateur scientists from humble life were vulnerable to misrepresentation by their biographers, whether these were well intentioned or unscrupulous. This was partly because their voices were deemed in need of interpretation and polishing in order to make them publicly presentable. It is worth considering what happened when the working-class subject taken up by the biographer was a man whose limited notoriety rested precisely on the strength of his voice: namely, a poet. Not all 'uneducated poets' were 'obscure', as the fame of Robert Burns and James Hogg proves. Yet the story of an aspiring poet from humble life propelled to short-lived fame through patronage only to return to obscurity had become a common one by

²⁶⁵ Samuel Smiles, *Life of a Scotch Naturalist* (London: John Murray, 1897), p. xix.

the early nineteenth century. Such biographies were a predominantly Romantic trend given a Victorian twist in a number of minor later nineteenth-century works.

Frederick Martin's *Life of John Clare* (1865) breaks the mould.²⁶⁶ The work is exceptional on many accounts: it is a rare biography of a 'working' man to ignore an exemplary framework, to describe his subject's weaknesses unapologetically, and to represent a discontented working man. John Clare, furthermore, was no mediocre rhymester but a true poetic talent who, by the time Martin wrote his biography, was widely forgotten. John Clare (1793-1864) had first caught public attention with the help of the early nineteenth-century mode of patronage. His *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) was preceded by biographical accounts of Clare in the *London Magazine* aimed at attracting subscribers. As was usual with 'uneducated poets' the poems were overshadowed by an emphasis on the humble provenance of their author (and, usually, reassurances of his humility, temperance and worthiness). Clare's popularity was short-lived, and by the time he entered the first of two asylums in 1837 he had become neglected, though he continued to write until his death in 1864. His longevity meant that, though commonly classified as a Romantic, he was also a Victorian, something of significance to Clare's biographer who would attack his contemporaries for their neglect.

Clare's biographer, who also edited the poems of Chatterton, along with a brief biographical sketch, was attracted to the tragic destinies of poets, and felt that he himself had 'been fighting the battle of life in a rather rough manner'.²⁶⁷ Frederick Martin was a German Jew who moved to England and worked as Carlyle's amanuensis from 1856. Carlyle described him as a 'desolate little German' given to 'hysterical futilities', and an exasperating tendency of 'whistling thro' the nose'. (Martin was soon dismissed, and later found to have

²⁶⁶ Frederick Martin, *The Life of John Clare* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1865).

²⁶⁷ Frederick Martin to Macmillans, 27th February 1864. *BL Add MS 55402*. 1864-1882. Correspondence with Macmillans.

stolen some of Carlyle's manuscripts.²⁶⁸) Nevertheless, Martin, who went on to edit the *Statesman's Year-Book* for Macmillan, was a diligent researcher and impassioned biographer. Martin does not list his sources, and it is difficult to determine to which of Clare's manuscripts he had access, though it is certain that he read 'some very curious autobiographical memoirs' (ix) (known as 'Sketches in the Life of John Clare'). *The Life of John Clare*, a vivid three hundred-page account with no other illustrations than a portrait of Clare, is an emotional plea for the recognition of a neglected poet, and above all a scrutiny of the public's relationship with, and responsibility to, the poet. It takes as its subject the point at which Smiles and Jolly leave off: the consequences of a rise from, and fall back into, obscurity.

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Frederick Martin drew heavily on the well-worn trope of the rise and fall of the 'uneducated poet' in his biography of John Clare. The public generally tired of the poet with astonishing rapidity. John Taylor the 'Water-Poet', Stephen Duck and James Woodhouse, for example, shared similar experiences. Commonly, the aspiring writer would appeal, by letter and flattering verses, to an influential patron who would circulate copies and vouch for his dependant's character. Biographical sketches were essential in presenting the poet to a public intrigued by the incongruence of a humble literary man. They looked to the poets for authenticity in appearance and verse: attempts by the peasants to develop a more sophisticated style were rejected or ridiculed. When relations between patron and poet soured as in the case of Ann Yearsley the 'milkwoman', who wanted more creative and financial independence from her patron Hannah More, the poet was condemned as thankless and put in her place. Such relationships between poet and patron recall those between biographer and obscure

²⁶⁸ Thomas Carlyle to Lord Ashburton, 20 December 1856. *NLS MS Acc. 11833*; Thomas Carlyle to John Carlyle, 21 March 1857. *NLS MS 525*. See Rosemary Ashton, *Thomas and Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage* (London, 2001), p. 386.

subject, with similar struggles for control and the same risk of tarnishing the attractive aura of authenticity of such subjects through extended public displays.

Robert Southey, then poet laureate, published *Attempts in Verse, by John Jones; an old servant: with some account of the Writer, Written by himself: and an introductory essay on the Lives and Works of Our Uneducated Poets* (1831) at a time when old-fashioned modes of patronage were being replaced by a very different literary market.²⁶⁹ *Attempts in Verse*, published by subscription, displays Southey's patronage of one John Jones. It is also an essay of literary history on the tradition of 'uneducated poets' that Southey believed was coming to an end as the 'March of Intellect' (12) entailed the spread of education. Jones is presented as 'humble' (8) but also as 'kind and happy' (11). It is a key tenet of the work that amateur poetry amongst the poor - for Southey rapidly dismisses the idea that the poems have real literary value - was conducive to 'moral' benefits. No social rise is wished for the poets other than comfort in their poverty. The comment on one poet that 'no spoon could have suited his mouth so well as the wooden one to which he was born' (86) is implied for all.

What is significant about the work is that it recognises the beginning of a new literary public sphere – the 'less tolerant and less charitable' public (8) – and offers biography as a means of preserving an old-fashioned mode of patronage. The biographer-as-patron carefully regulates the nature and length of his subject's presence amongst the public sphere, and all that is expected of the public is 'charity' (8). Acts of benevolence towards the 'mediocre' lead to the contentment of humble poets who are protected from an increasingly harsh public gaze, and contentment, Southey argues, is the foundation of harmonious social relations.

John Gibson Lockhart, in the *Quarterly Review*, agreed that the 'old man's verses' would be warmly received from those 'who appreciate the value of kindly relations between

²⁶⁹ Robert Southey, *Attempts in Verse, by John Jones; an old servant: with some account of the Writer, Written by himself: and an introductory essay on the Lives and Works of Our Uneducated Poets* (London: John Murray, 1831).

masters and dependants'.²⁷⁰ For another reviewer, writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, the work was misguided. The reviewer derides the idea that poetical talents promote 'piety and morality', and above all that 'private charity' still had a role to play in literature. Instead, he praises the existence of an 'independent' public no longer moved by images of 'picturesque poverty' in distributing 'temporary and misplaced relief'.²⁷¹ Southey's publication and its reception signal a turning point. The use of biography as a mode of mediation between a writer and his audience is questioned.

As Southey anticipated, the craze for patronizing humble poets largely dissipated in the Victorian period. Martha Vicinus has demonstrated in *The Industrial Muse* that thousands of working men wrote poetry, though these tended to be urban rather than rural poets. Many saw poetry as a passport to a more elevated sphere and tried to adapt their work to meet the tastes of the higher social classes who published them. As Vicinus describes, 'these poets did not offer insight into their urban and industrial communities, but gave instead idealizations of Nature, Poesy and Love',²⁷² wrote poor imitations of Milton, Shakespeare or eighteenth-century poets. These men were still dependent on the patronage and their published works were still prefaced by a biographical sketch that formed the basis of any critical response the book attracted. As in earlier periods, the poet was quickly abandoned when he showed ambitions of class transgression. Their work seemed all the weaker in comparison with the type of poet of the Alton Locke variety who published in working-class newspapers by Chartists and Unionists and took on political and social subjects. It was these, who did not rely on patronage and a biographical framework, that writers such as Carlyle and Kingsley paid attention to in their articles.

²⁷⁰ [John Gibson Lockhart review], *QR*, 44 (January - February 1831), p. 54.

²⁷¹ [Unsigned review], *ER*, 54 (August-December 1831), pp. 76; 79; 80.

²⁷² Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London, 1974), p. 144.

Romantic ideas of natural genius and of the poet as recluse are maintained in most of the biographies. The anonymous *Sketches of Obscure Poets* (1833), which closely resembles Southey's essay, opens with the Wordsworthian statement that the 'Poet's emotions are not only more vivid and intense, but more delicate, than those of other men'. A biographical preface for another humble poet similarly argues that the 'exquisite sensibility' of poets makes them more vulnerable to misery.²⁷³ There was never, however, any question of the 'uneducated' poet acting as a 'cultural legislator', however unacknowledged. Instead, Victorian biographers of 'uneducated' poets brought a new element by reconfiguring poetry as an extension of contemporary productivity. The author of *Sketches of Obscure Poets* insists that hyper-sensibility can be harmonised with 'habits of industry'.²⁷⁴ Poetry becomes another form of work. The narrator comments of one poet that 'nearly as soon as each work was disposed of, the produce was exhausted by the wants of the author and his family'.²⁷⁵ The word 'produce' underscores the quasi-utilitarian function of the verse. Edwin Paxton Hood carried this notion even further in *The Literature of Labour* (1851). Hood believed in the oxymoronic idea that genius was neither 'rare' nor 'extraordinary', to which he added the conviction that a Romantic notion of genius as something innate was dangerous. For Hood, genius should be coupled with industry. Literature, by even the humblest practitioner, is seen as economically beneficial to the nation: 'the printer is set to work; artists, engravers, binders, and all these persons must live'.²⁷⁶ The poet does not contemplate society from afar but must demonstrate a more social form of productivity.

²⁷³ [Anonymous], *Sketches of Obscure Poets* (London: Cochrane and McCrone, 1833), p. vii. ; John James, *Poems by John Nicholson, the Airedale Poet, with a Sketch of his Life and Writings* (London: Longmans, 1844), p. iii.

²⁷⁴ *Sketches of Obscure Poets*, p. xii.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

²⁷⁶ Edwin Paxton Hood, *The Literature of Labour: Illustrious Instances of the Education of Poetry in Poverty* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1851), p. 24.

What these works also demonstrate was that the biographer gradually took over the function of the old-fashioned patron. The biographers depict the genre as an idealised democratic space in which two disparate classes may meet. Hood notes that educated readers would find in his work of collective biography 'the love of the spiritual life glowing in the bosoms of men upon whom he has been in the habit of looking with contempt'.²⁷⁷ The appearance of the uneducated poet in the public sphere was carefully mediated by the biographer. The poets serve the same type of exemplary function as the naturalists or temperance subjects.

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The place of poetry in society, the poetic temperament and the dangers of patronage are also all considered in Frederick Martin's *The Life of John Clare*, yet Martin takes on these themes with greater sophistication. Initially, however, he seems to follow the tradition of biographies of humble poets by neglecting the 'peasant poet's' verse in favour of lively anecdotes. He quotes only eight of Clare's poems, and includes them all in the final third of the biography, when Clare was lapsing into madness. Neither does he offer critical insights. Clare's genius is explained in terms of feelings rather than of craft. Martin's only commentary on the first of Clare's poems he quotes is that 'the verses came flowing from his pen' (238); of 'The Flitting', the reader is simply informed that 'his feelings found vent in the verses' (247). The biography to some degree draws on the tradition of regarding uneducated poets as born rhymesters and insists that 'a poet he had always been - had been from the day when, a tottering child' (238). Such claims of natural poetic genius are not followed by the additional tribute of considering the poet's work in a more critical and serious manner.

Frederick Martin is uncertain how much to make of Clare's humble origins. As in many other accounts of humble poets, Martin exploits the seeming incongruence of

²⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 9-11.

juxtaposing a 'poet' with a 'peasant' (one of his chapters is even entitled 'The Poet as Pedlar'). Clare himself had co-operated in this image, though he had no other real option. Yet Martin condemns those who reduced Clare to the 'Northamptonshire Peasant'. He quotes this title in inverted commas to signal his own distance from it, and evokes it in the context of the public's mistreatment of Clare, who was 'duly petted, flattered, lionized, and caressed - and, of course, as duly forgotten when his nine days were passed' (preface). He uses the word 'peasant' in inverted commas throughout, almost always following this with an attack on irresponsible patronage. His unease with the label reveals a desire that the poet should be judged on his own merits, separate from his background, yet he does not follow this up by providing a critical rather than a biographical approach to Clare.

Martin manages to reconcile Clare's origins and his poetic activities by advocating a combination of work and art in much the same way as Edwin Paxton Hood. He applauds Clare when the poet's waning fortunes lead him to contemplate a return to the farming life.

Clare

Almost wondered why he had ever despaired [...]. There was wealth and health sufficient springing from his daily labour [...]. And there was joy scarce ever known when sitting down, at rare intervals, to the inspiration of the muse. [...] Clare knew that the poetry, offspring of these happy hours, was far superior to anything that had ever flown from his pen. He almost felt as if now, and now only, he was becoming a true poet (237).

The 'daily labour' of the peasant provides a healthy counterbalance to poetry, which Martin depicts as a state of unhealthy self-absorption. Clare's muse appears all the more powerful for being visited in moderation, and Clare is a better poet for also being a farmer, partly because he is no longer dependent on inconstant patrons for his livelihood but also because he is more balanced. There is also a sense that the poet cannot content himself with contemplation but must demonstrate a more social form of productivity.

As in so many other biographies of the working class, this stance means that the removal of a humble poet to a different social class is not encouraged. However, Martin is unusual in laying the blame for unsuccessful social experiments on the wealthier classes who encourage them. Jolly and Samuel Smiles, as indeed other biographers of working men, were responsible for bringing obscure men before the public. Unlike them, Frederick Martin's main theme is the *consequence* of plucking a subject from obscurity for public entertainment.²⁷⁸

Martin approaches the problem by an extensive use of clothes-related imagery. Clare's public, initially attracted to his 'natural' condition, turn him into an artificial construct. Martin uses the poet's clothes as a metonymy for his status in society: Clare is literally a mis-fit, setting out into the world 'in a threadbare coat which he had long outgrown, and the sleeves of which were at his elbows; with a pair of breeches a world too large for his slender legs' (13). As he gains notoriety, he finds his 'dirty clothes [...] entirely out of place' (85) with the fine surroundings in which he finds himself. The poet finds himself 'clothes in garments such as he had never before worn', including

a noble, though very uncomfortable, high hat; while his heavy shoes seemed changed by a covering of brilliant polish. Surveying his figure, thus altered, in a looking-glass, John was greatly satisfied with himself, and with a proud step marched off towards Holywell Park (96).

Though Clare seems pleased, his more sophisticated outfit is difficult to wear, and it is ominous that his shoes have not been replaced but superficially covered. It is the figure in the mirror with whom Clare is satisfied, which suggests the beginning of a rift between the poet and his doppelganger, resulting in madness.

Clare is later ensconced in 'an ancient overcoat somewhat too large for him, but useful as hiding his whole figure from the top of his head down to the heels' (112). As in so much literature of the double, he is both protected and smothered by his double and sartorial alter-

²⁷⁸ Lockhart's 1828 biography of Robert Burns offers a similar tale of patronage and its consequences. Though Burns struggled with his patrons his poetic reputation endured, unlike John Clare's.

ego. Great emphasis is laid upon an episode in which Clare joins the army but is given an ill-fitting suit of clothes. Clare's trousers appear to be made 'for a giant' and to 'prevent his tumbling over them, like a clown in the pantomime, he held up his pantaloons with one hand, while with the other he kept his helmet from falling in the mud' (46). The theatrical metaphor draws attention to the way in which Clare will continue to be displayed throughout his short public career. Martin's biography is unusual in wavering between the poet's and the public's perspective, and in underlining the paradox of the desire to celebrate the natural by removing it from its sphere and putting it on display. If the poet becomes a madman, the work suggests, it is as much due to the pressures from without as to those within.

Yet there are many parallels between patronage and biography. Martin consistently condemns individuals who lionized Clare only to abandon him later. He doubts that the publishers Octavius Gilchrist and John Taylor 'thoroughly appreciated John Clare' and notes that the introducing 'account of John Clare' published in Taylor's *London Magazine* was

in the tone in which a *parvenu* might speak of a pauper. [...] Though perhaps well-meant in the first instance, this patronizing manner in speaking of Clare, and attracting public attention to him, less as a poetical genius, but as happening to be a poor man, did mischief in the end. It did more than this – it killed John Clare (88).

Martin ignores the complicity of his own biography in perpetuating the interest in Clare as a man rather than as a poet. The tone of the biography swerves constantly between amusement and condescension, and the narrative is focused throughout upon a string of quirky anecdotes. He uses direct speech to an unusual extent, and the work is unquestionably lively. Yet the means employed to resuscitate the deceased and neglected poet echo those strategies that 'killed' Clare, as the work relies to a large extent upon the public's curiosity and willingness to be entertained.

This ambivalence can partly be explained by Frederick Martin's ambiguous attitude towards poets. Clare is in turn the 'deeply-distressed poet' (66), the 'much-humbled poet' (79), the 'shy and awkward poet' (84) or again the 'astonished poet' (107). The lofty vision of the inspired poet is also undermined. Describing Clare's reception of some unfavourable criticism, Martin writes:

He read it over; read it once, twice; and then grasped the counter to prevent himself from falling to the ground. It was the first harsh literary criticism the poor poet had to submit to in his life. The blood rushed to his face; his hands clinched the fatal letter, as if to annihilate its existence (79).

The passage recalls the myth of Keats's slaying by a negative review, yet the drama is rapidly displaced as Mr. Drury sets about cheering the poet with a bottle of ale. Martin again undermines the self-important stance of the poet when narrating a lengthy anecdote in which a drunken Clare falls asleep in an empty hackney coach. The poet wakes to find himself carried away by the coach. He determines to leap out, but the coachman

had him by the collar in an instant, crying, 'And who are you?' Clare tried to explain; introducing himself as author of 'Poems of Rural Life,' and the 'Village Minstrel,' in two volumes, with engravings (153).

The Dickensian turn of phrase, comically rounded off with the punctilious insistence upon the 'engravings' once more shatters the poet's composure and dignity, as does Clare's too perfect assumption of the role of 'uneducated poet'. Martin's delight at the misadventures of his subject is evident. Such depictions which mock poetic pretensions alternate with requests for a less faddish, artificial approach to poetry. Above all, however, they present the poet as a profoundly vulnerable figure.

The biographer mirrors old-fashioned patrons in betraying and exploiting the defenceless poet. Yet he is also the guardian of the poet's posthumous reputation, rather than simply, as with patrons, an advocate during the poet's lifetime. Even though his approach to

Clare's poetry broadly resembles that of other biographers of uneducated poets, Frederick Martin differs strongly from them in the stance he takes on Clare's behaviour. The poet's romantic dalliances, drinking habits and even his madness are all narrated without condemnation. Whilst these are all retold with great frankness, however, Martin does play with the materials of Clare's life in other areas.

It is difficult to determine how many of Martin's distortions were errors and how many were deliberate. A comparison with Clare's autobiographical writings, to some of which Martin had access, presents a useful point of comparison. Martin's alterations do not involve the suppression of embarrassing facts but, on the contrary, the development and romancing of episodes in Clare's life. In one passage, Clare responds to a suggestion that he should write an 'Invitation to Subscribers' and arrives at the Post Office to send it. Clare describes the moment:

When I got to the Post Office they wanted a Penny as I was past the hour, but as I had none and hating to look so little as to make the confession I said with a little pettishness that it was not mine and that I should not pay for other peoples letters the man lookd a little supprisd at the unusual garb of the letter which I was half ashamd of – directed with a pencil, written on a sheet of paper and to add to its novelty sealed with shoemakers wax. I saw his smile and retreated as fast as I could from the town²⁷⁹

Here is Martin's version:

The post-office was closed, and the clerk at the wicket demanded one penny as a fee for taking in the late letter. John Clare fumbled in his pockets, and found that he had not so much as a farthing in his possession. In a rueful voice he asked the man at the wicket to take the letter without the penny. The clerk glanced at the singular piece of paper handed to him, the pencilled, ill-spelt address, the coarse pitch, instead of sealing-wax, at the back, and with a contemptuous smile, threw the letter into a box at his side. Without uttering another word, he then shut the door in Clare's face. And the poor poet hurried home, burying his face in his hands (63).

Martin greatly exaggerates the antagonism between the clerk and the poet hinted in Clare's version. The desire to romance the life is not a sufficient explanation for Martin's changes,

²⁷⁹ John Clare, 'Sketches in the Life of John Clare', in *John Clare by Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Manchester, 1996), p. 23.

since Clare's version is in itself extremely lively. In Martin's it is Clare's quality as a poet that is diminished rather than simply his confidence as in the autobiography. The poet's voice is weak ('rueful') and his words clumsy ('ill-spelt address'). Whereas Clare spoke up in his version in refusing to pay, his voice is muted in Martin's version and the clerk prevents him from speaking any further. The 'poor poet' further obscures himself by 'burying' his face. It is typical of Martin that it is the figure of the poet that is placed under threat. In the autobiography, Clare's voice is strong; in Martin's work, it is the biographer's. The reduction of Clare to a trembling, helpless figure mistreated by his entourage only increases the nobility of Martin's act of championing. The biographer exaggerates the extent to which his subject needs the biographical rescue he provides.

Martin rescues the poet by giving him a mythical dimension. Clare's life is 'the old tale, all over' (preface), and his life partakes of tragedy (his rise and fall), comedy (his numerous misadventures), pastoral ('while the sheep were grazing on the borders of Helpo's Heath, [...] the young shepherd and shepherdess talked sweet things to each other, careless of flocks and herds', 4) and the picaresque, as the poet sets off to seek his fortune in London (109). Such shifts foster the notion that Clare represents all that literature can encompass.

Indeed, Clare's life is linked with the most powerful emblem of England's literary heritage: Shakespeare. Clare is compared to Hamlet ('Like Hamlet – 'He repulsed, / Fell into a sadness, then into a fast, / Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness', 263) His courtship of Patty is closely modelled upon the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* (67) and, as Jonathan Bate has noticed, the manner in which Martin describes the wooing of Clare's mother by his father who would tell her stories of foreign lands 'is lifted straight from *Othello*'.²⁸⁰ As always with Martin, there is a sense that these references might be either cruelly mocking or a means of raising Clare to a more tragic level, in accordance with Carlyle's view that there is

²⁸⁰ Jonathan Bate, 'John Clare: Prologue to a New Life', in *John Clare: New Approaches*, ed. John Goodridge and Simon Kövesi (Helpston, 2000), p. 7.

‘the fifth act of a Tragedy in every death-bed’. More contemporary references are also used: Martin quotes from Tennyson’s ‘Locksley Hall’ to describe Clare’s feelings (‘Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands; / Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands [...]’, 21). It is surprising that Martin should use another poet’s words to describe Clare’s feelings, when he could have chosen words from Clare himself. On the one hand this further diminishes Clare’s own voice. On the other, the references make Clare part of a richer literary culture and encourage the reader to see him in this broader light.

The passages in which Martin abandons his light and teasing tone are those in which he assumes the role of cultural guardian. In his final paragraph, he becomes more ponderous:

There now lies, under the shade of a sycamore-tree, [...] all that earth has to keep of John Clare, one of the sweetest singers of nature ever born within the fair realm of dear old England – of dear old England, so proud of its galaxy of noble poets, and so wasteful of their lives (295-6).

Martin here avoids basing his claims for Clare’s recognition upon his working-class status, and moves instead from the particular to the general, with the mythical overtones of ‘dear old England’, and the ‘galaxy of noble poets’. The biographer uses his position to address an entire nation and call it to account for its irresponsible treatment of its cultural heritage. For Martin, Clare’s treatment at the hands of his patron and public is a ‘national disgrace’ (263). Clare is used as an archetype, an image of the nation itself.

Martin constructed his argument so forcefully that this aspect of the biography was the first one that an *Athenaeum* reviewer picked up. The writer agreed that

there is nothing which the wise and righteous should more earnestly take to heart than the duty they owe to those in the humbler classes of society who possess the fatal gift of imagination. There has been nothing more frivolously misunderstood or more perversely neglected.²⁸¹

Martin gradually loses the initial drive of the biography, which was to bring proper recognition to Clare, as the work becomes a reflection on how the cultural heritage is

²⁸¹ [Unsigned review], *The Athenaeum*, 1964 (June 17, 1865), p. 806.

preserved. It is the forgetting of this 'duty' that is of greater importance than the forgetting of individual poets. Frederick Martin is undoubtedly unusual in depicting a member of the lower classes in such frank and unembarrassed terms. In the manner in which he controls Clare's voice and, above all, in the idea that it is the public who is enriched by encountering the 'obscure' subject within a biography rather than the subject who is rescued by the biographer, *The Life of John Clare* does not stray far from other biographical representations of working-class men.

The biographers of working men, whether preachers, temperance workers, naturalists or poets, were generally more alert than biographers of women regarding the extent to which their choice of subject entailed a reconsideration of the biographical genre itself. Neither biographers of women nor biographers of men drew attention to their subjects in order to beg for a revaluation of their place in society. The biographer's voice is always carefully controlling – sometimes, indeed, excessively so. The function of these works was therefore not, unlike many feminist or Marxist biographies today, to make new and lasting heroes of these men and women. The stress on the poetry of these lives and their picturesque qualities situated their value elsewhere. The recurrent attempt to imagine the reader within the biographies suggests that the biographers were far more concerned with the imaginative impact of their work. The readers are often asked little more than to connect emotionally with the subject who, even in the case of John Clare, becomes eclipsed by a broader narrative about the vigour of the nation and the ties that bind its citizens together.

It is striking that biographers and novelists repeatedly describe encountering 'obscure' individuals in the street. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell explores the 'romance' of 'some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town'; in *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator

draws attention to those ‘whom you pass unnoticingly on the road every day’.²⁸² Jolly is concerned with interpreting to the ‘majority of mankind’ the people they meet ‘on the highway’ (327); C. L. Brightwell’s *Heroes of the Laboratory* (1859) grows out of a brief encounter the biographer had with a working-class man on the street²⁸³ and Thomas Carlyle was deeply moved by Boswell’s narration of Johnson’s encounter with a prostitute in the street. The implication is that this is a momentary contact. The biography is like the street in which individuals from vastly different social spheres find a safe and temporary place to meet.

²⁸² Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 7; George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Oxford, 1980), p. 172.

²⁸³ Brightwell, *Heroes of the Laboratory and the Workshop*, p. v.

Chapter Four

'Mute, inglorious Miltons': Biographies of Writers

The first two chapters have considered how biographers approached the problematical task of publicly commemorating individuals who were expected to live in the shadows. Though biographers of most women and working-class men drew attention to their subjects by narrating their lives, they did not expect nor want their subjects to become famous or alter their submissive status. It is useful now to reflect on the nature of the biographical enterprise when, conversely, the biographer worked hard to canonise his previously neglected subject.

The rise of literary biography in the nineteenth century sharpened the contrast between famous and neglected writers. (Writers, more than painters, musicians or dancers, attracted intense public curiosity, therefore their biographies offer more insights into the process of canonisation than those of other artists.²⁸⁴) The appearance of biographies of neglected or unsuccessful writers depended on the rise of literary biography itself. Though there are earlier examples of literary biography, the eighteenth century was principally responsible for its development. William Mason's 1774 biography of Thomas Gray was the first literary biography to extensively use a writer's letters, Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) mingled biographical narrative and critical insights with new sophistication, and James

²⁸⁴ See Codell, *The Victorian Artist*, for a parallel with visual artists.

Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) made an unprecedented use of the subject's conversations and mannerisms.

Before the eighteenth century, it was assumed that the literary character held little interest. The best-selling works of Isaac D'Israeli such as *An Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character* (1795), with its combination of gossipy anecdotes and psychological analysis of the artistic temperament, illustrates how much this view had changed within a century. Prominent writers such as William Godwin, Robert Southey, William Hazlitt and Thomas de Quincey all wrote within the biographical genre. This did not prevent writers from being suspicious of literary biography. Wordsworth is representative in praising the genre as 'an art' yet arguing that 'our business' is with authors' books: 'If their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished.'²⁸⁵ Though the autobiographical impulse behind so much Romantic poetry seemed to license biographical investigations, he insisted that biography was either redundant or risked drawing attention away from the work. Nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth century, biographies of famous poets and novelists – lives of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens and Lord Alfred Tennyson, to name a few – flooded the market and sold in their thousands.

The transformation of the writer's public status can be explained by elements that resonate strongly with the themes that preoccupied biographers of 'obscure' lives. It depended, as Richard Altick declares in his seminal *Lives and Letters*, on 'the general shift of literary interest from external action to the inner spectacle of the mind and feelings'. Literary biography combines the attractions of 'the psychological novel and the confessional lyric'.²⁸⁶ The increasing interest in inner lives rather than outward achievement also facilitated the creation of biographies of hidden lives. Moreover, the Romantic cult of the individual, the

²⁸⁵ Wordsworth, 'Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns', p. 122.

²⁸⁶ Altick, *Lives and Letters*, p. xi.

claims made for the importance of the artist as a prophet-like man endowed with a heightened sensibility – all contributed towards creating the figure of the author as an outsider contemplating society from afar, and even very famous writers could appear remote. The appeal of ‘outsiders’ again created a bridge for the consideration of other types of detached or alienated individuals.

Unsurprisingly, it was also the Romantics who developed the paradoxical notion of the neglected poet. Writers were sceptical of the new reading public forming around them. As Leo Braudel argues in *The Frenzy of Renown*, there was a growing ‘mistrust of the new audience for its inability properly to read, interpret, and appreciate the dimensions of their genius.’²⁸⁷ Poets resented the fact that their recognition and fame depended on such readers and in response they developed the figure of the artist who is neglected and unappreciated in his lifetime only to be celebrated by a later, more sophisticated, audience. Chatterton exemplified this idea. To be obscure became a sign of true literary value. The public had to be taught to appreciate them, or, as Wordsworth famously expressed it, the original writer has ‘the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed’.²⁸⁸

The Romantic literature on the neglected artist is vast, from the numerous references in Keats’s letters to an unsatisfactory contemporary public and the rewards to be reaped posthumously to Wordsworth’s ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface’ (1815). Richard Hengist Horne published an ‘Exposition of the False Medium and Barriers Excluding Men of Genius from the Public’ (1833). W. H. Ireland, now neglected himself, published ‘Neglected Genius. A Poem’ in 1812, in which he pastiches the styles of various obscure ‘geniuses’ and denounces the ‘shameful neglect which the Sons of Genius have experienced’.²⁸⁹ Shelley’s phrase describing poets as ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the world’ is perhaps the most

²⁸⁷ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame & Its History* (Oxford, 1986), p. 417.

²⁸⁸ William Wordsworth, ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface’, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Volume III* (Oxford, 1974), p. 80.

²⁸⁹ W. H. Ireland, *Neglected Genius: A Poem* (London, 1812), p. xvii.

famous expression of this theme. Obscurity was given a positive construction, instead of serving simply as the antithesis to fame. Yet the power of obscurity rested on an understanding that it was only a temporary condition.

The Victorians were the ones first faced with the task of sorting the numerous claims to posthumous fame of these Romantic poets – of distinguishing the Keatses from the W. H. Irelands. The Victorian reception of Romantic poets has been given sustained attention, yet the response of Victorian biographers to the Romantic idea of the neglected genius has been largely ignored, even though it was biographers who held the most immediate, though not the only, influence in determining which were the poets who merited reconsideration.

Though Victorian biographies of neglected geniuses were published throughout the nineteenth century the most significant ones appeared in the early to mid-Victorian period. Southey's *Lives of the Uneducated Poets*, however small its impact, heralded to some extent the later works by scrutinising the claims of neglected poets, though this was the work of a Romantic rather than a Victorian. Most of the later biographers had close links with Thomas Carlyle, whether simply as a friend (Monckton Milnes), amanuensis (Frederick Martin), or ardent admirer (Alexander Gilchrist). The Pre-Raphaelites, who had a strong interest in drawing attention to neglected artists who they believed prefigured their own concerns, were another important group of influence.

Three works deserve particular attention. The biography of Keats by Richard Monckton Milnes (1848), Carlyle's *The Life of John Sterling* (1851), and Alexander Gilchrist's life of William Blake (1863) are very different biographies on subjects of widely varying talents. (Two of these also held other interests: Sterling moved between literature and

the Church, and Gilchrist celebrated Blake equally for his art and for his poetry.)²⁹⁰ A number of lesser biographies of far more obscure talents picked up the themes that these biographers more skilfully developed. The biographies share an interest in their poet's neglect, which leads them to consider the causes and consequences of the artist's alienation from society.

These biographies differ from the lives of both women and working-class subjects – subjects considered in some manner as marginal or powerless, but who needed to remain so for the health of society – in the demands placed on the reader. As the Romantics posited the existence of a future, sophisticated, audience, the Victorian biographers are led to consider the nature of their own audience and the role they should play in rehabilitating obscure subjects. A common theme, as in Frederick Martin's biography of John Clare, is the responsibility of the nation in protecting its literary heritage. The biographer also claims a role of great cultural importance, as one who can reconcile the neglected poet with his audience and, as with the other biographies of obscure or hidden subjects, biography is again presented as a genre that can heal rifts in society.

Richard Monckton Milnes's *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848)

'It is an appropriate convention to take R. M. Milnes's *Life, Letters and Literary Remains* as the dividing line between Keats's obscurity and his fame.'²⁹¹ G. M. Matthews's statement is representative of many accounts of John Keats's ascension to the status of national treasure. Critics are fond of contrasting the lament of Keats's publisher, John Taylor, who declared, fourteen years after the poet's death, that 'the world cares nothing for him',²⁹² with the public's rediscovery, or discovery, of the poet in the second half of the nineteenth

²⁹⁰ Frederick Martin's *Life of John Clare* straddles between this group and those biographies that represented humble subjects. See chapter 3.

²⁹¹ G. M. Matthews, *Keats: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1971) p. 31.

²⁹² Quoted in Edmund Blunden (ed.), *Shelley and Keats as They Struck Their Contemporaries* (London, 1925), p. 82.

century. Though Keats's reputation was rising even before the biography, notably through the efforts of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Cambridge Apostles (of which Milnes was a member), Milnes's 1848 biography undoubtedly precipitated his re-evaluation as a poet of great national importance. The history of Keats's reputation, including the importance of Milnes's work, has already been given thorough consideration.²⁹³ Milnes's interest in the theme of literary neglect and his influence on later nineteenth-century biographies of 'mute, inglorious Miltons' has attracted less discussion.

The delay in producing a biography of Keats (1795-1821) was partly due to rivalries between the poet's friends and family who all announced their intention to write a memoir. Milnes's intervention meant that the result was neither a domestic biography nor a work of personal literary reminiscence such as Leigh Hunt's *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (1828) or Trelawny's 1858 memoir of Shelley, but a biography that seemed to provide a more impartial approach. Richard Monckton Milnes, later Baron Houghton, divided his talents between politics, as a Conservative MP, and literature. His two-volume biography of Keats is rightly considered his most important work. The attempt to rescue Keats from neglect was part of Milnes's wider interest in acting as patron to emerging or struggling talent – or, as Henry Adams expressed it, in 'unearthing new coins and trying to give them currency.'²⁹⁴ (Other protégés included Swinburne, Tennyson, and Coventry Patmore.) The biography is an exercise in trying to reconcile the Romantic celebration of obscurity with the project of rescuing or restoring a reputation.

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Milnes is concerned as much with obscurity as with fame throughout the work, and offers many asides on neglect as a theme that goes beyond Keats. The theme of neglect and

²⁹³ See George H. Ford, *Keats and the Victorians: A Study of his Influence and Rise to Fame, 1821-1895* (New Haven, 1944).

²⁹⁴ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York, 1931), p. 139.

posthumous fame was one with which Keats himself was intensely preoccupied. Milnes extends it by stressing the parallels between Chatterton and Keats, describing how Keats spoke of the young poet 'with a sort of prescient sympathy'.²⁹⁵ In the final pages of the biography Milnes states that Keats has gained his 'rightful place among the "inheritors of unfulfilled renown"' (II, 103). The use of the phrase from *Adonais*, Shelley's tribute to Keats, without the mention of Shelley's name or the phrase's source relies on the public's sufficient knowledge of both Shelley and Keats to understand the quotation. Milnes does not address the paradox that if a poet has attracted a myth, however unflattering, he cannot be so very obscure. This recalls the manner in which Elizabeth Gaskell played with the idea of the famous obscure in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. The 'famously neglected poet' was a recognisable figure, and the neglect is used to increase the fame.

The final paragraph of the biography delivers a different reflection on fame and neglect as the gravest 'lesson' that the 'tale' has to offer:

the vulgar great are comprehended and adored, because they are in reality on the same moral plane with those who admire; but he who deserves the higher reverence must himself convert the worshipper (II, 107).

Milnes is no longer concerned with Keats but with the wider ramifications of his story. Andrew Bennett argues that the key texts of English Romantic poetics depict 'two different kinds of poetic reception: an immediate and popular applause on the one hand and an initial rejection of the artwork followed by more lasting and more worthwhile appreciation on the other'.²⁹⁶ Milnes brings his support to this view. The notion of converting the worshipper closely echoes Wordsworth's statement on the poet's task of '*creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed'.²⁹⁷ An *Athenaeum* reviewer, indeed, felt that the heart of Keats's struggle lay 'in the necessity which original genius must experience of *creating* a task for its

²⁹⁵ Richard Monckton Milnes, edited by, *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats* (London: Edward Moxon, 1848), vol. I, p. 2.

²⁹⁶ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 21.

²⁹⁷ Wordsworth, 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', p. 80.

appreciation'.²⁹⁸ The biography is offered as both a demonstration and a test of Romantic notions of worthiness.

Poised between the Romantic and the Victorian ages, Milnes gives a confused interpretation of the value of obscurity. In a strange passage early in the biography, he pauses on the 'delusion' of youth, 'enjoyed, thank God, by thousands', that they will become famous. These youthful aspirants

soon learn to estimate their own capacities aright and tranquilly submit to the obscure and transitory condition of their existence: it is felt by many, who look back on it in after years with a smiling pity to think they were so deceived, but who, nevertheless, recognise in that aspiration the spring of their future energies and usefulness in other and far different fields of action [...] (I, 16-7).

The joyful submission to obscurity has little in common with the longings for future fame expressed by the young Romantic poets and strikes an odd note in a biography of Keats that seeks to rescue his reputation. The idea of usefulness in obscurity, coupled with the self-discipline implied by the careful estimation of one's capacities and the word 'submit', has more in common with later, didactic, biographies, such as those of Smiles. Fame, according to Milnes, is indeed less satisfying than the youthful desire for fame; the emotion is more important than the results.

The celebration of youthful enthusiasm draws on the Romantic depictions of childhood and adolescence in works such as *The Prelude*. The lines echo the rhapsodic descriptions of 'The Poets of England who have died Young', an essay on Chatterton, Shelley, Keats and Sir Philip Sidney published in 1839 in the *Cambridge University Magazine*. The author excitedly declares that 'the feelings instilled into the heart in early youth are among the most beautiful in the whole stage of our existence'.²⁹⁹ Yet Milnes's description is followed by a curious image of quiet resignation in later age as a consequence

²⁹⁸ [Unsigned review], *Athenaeum*, 1085 (August 12, 1848), p. 789.

²⁹⁹ [Unsigned], 'The Poets of England who have Died Young', *The Cambridge University Magazine*, 1 (1839), p. 2.

of the more rational and less tempestuous acceptance of life's duties. The passage is in fact a nostalgic commentary on the unsustainable intensity of Romantic longings.

As with so many of these biographies, the discussion turns to the value of stimulating human empathy, which in turn enriches the nation. The lessons offered by the life of Keats 'are the lessons by which the sympathies of mankind must be interested, and their faculties educated, up to the love of such a character and the comprehension of such an intelligence' (II, 107). When he alludes to Keats's friend, the neglected painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, Milnes declares that

surely a man should not have been so left to perish, whose passion for lofty art, notwithstanding all discouragements, must have made him dear to artists, and whose capabilities were such as in any other country would have assured him at least competence and reputation – perhaps wealth and fame (I, 26).

The fate of Chatterton is similarly described as 'so disgraceful to the age in which it occurred' (I, 12). Milnes's anger at contemporary neglect sits uneasily alongside the idea of posthumous fame as the only worthwhile indicator of genius.

Milnes does not expand on an interesting aspect of his denunciation: the idea that the neglect of talent is a particularly British characteristic. Wordsworth, in 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', described the history of neglect as a specific element of English Poetry. Frederick Martin's biography of Clare ends with a similar appeal to 'dear old England, so proud of its galaxy of noble poets, and so wasteful of their lives'.³⁰⁰ The *Athenaeum* agreed that this was a particularly English problem, as 'in this country [...] "the rewards of fame are scanty and ill-proportioned"'.³⁰¹ Like Clare, Milnes sees his biography as presenting a 'moral' (II, 107) of national import. The biographer acts as a cultural guardian who can hasten the education of a recalcitrant public and the safe-keeper of the national canon.

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³⁰⁰ See Chapter 3.

³⁰¹ [Unsigned review], *Athenaeum* (1848) p. 789.

Keats's biographer unabashedly presents the work as an exercise in rehabilitation. Milnes states clearly that his aim is that 'of vindicating the character and advancing the fame' of his subject (I, xi), and he carefully considered the 'procedure [...] most likely to raise the character of Keats in the estimation of those most capable of judging it' (I, xvi). The biographer's role is 'as far as may be, to repair the injustice of destiny' (I, 3). It is worth noting that Milnes did not recognise Keats's genius to the extent that the poet has been celebrated since this biography. For him, Keats's works 'are rather the records of a poetic education than the accomplished work of the mature artist' (II, 52), and the biography pays homage to the promise he displayed rather than a corpus of undisputed genius. Nevertheless, Milnes is keen to 'claim for Keats an access to that inmost penetralium of Fame which is solely consecrated to original genius' (I, 94).

This aim raises questions concerning the triangular relationship between the poet, the biographer and the public. Samuel Phillips, writing in *The Times*, suggested that it was the biographer rather than the poet who moulded public taste in order to prepare it to re-evaluate an artist. He declares that

we are again summoned to admire where once we despised. [...] We may in the public market-place do justice to the citizen whom we ostracised in ignorance and hooted forth in folly.³⁰²

The review begins by opposing the forces of public and biographer, who has unbounded authority to 'summon'. The readers are brought forward to demonstrate a collective act of repentance. In Phillips's words, the crime they have committed goes beyond poetic taste and touches the health of society and the social contract.

The biographer is confronted with the clash of two different ages and two different conceptions of both poet and public. Milnes clearly endorsed the Romantic idea of the more sophisticated posthumous audience educated to appreciate the neglected poet, and felt that

³⁰² [Samuel Phillips], 'The Life of John Keats', *The Times*, 19972 (September 19, 1848), p. 3.

appreciation of Keats depended on 'men of thought and sensibility' (II, 105). Yet whilst he participates in the process of educating the public, through the collation of previously unavailable material such as Keats's letters, he does not rely uniquely on the sophistication of his audience.

Instead, Milnes meets readers half way and presents them with an image of Keats more acceptable to a mid-nineteenth century public. He sets out to dismiss those aspects of the Romantic poets of which later readers and critics had become suspicious. Keats here is no 'wayward, erratic genius, self-indulgent in conceits' (I, xvi). There is no mention of Fanny Brawne, no coarse humour, no cynicism. The effeminate poet was an object of scorn, notably by Carlyle, who derided Keats as 'a miserable creature, hungering after sweets he can't get'.³⁰³ Milnes's Keats, in opposition to prior depictions of the poet (notably by Byron), leads a 'plain, manly, practical life', which he is able to combine with 'a free exercise of his rich imagination' (I, 74). Milnes's Keats is a Victorian Keats.

Milnes also had to make a case for a poet at a time when the importance of poetry was being tested, three years before the Great Exhibition suggested that industry was a better test of the nation's greatness than its poets. Bentham's declaration that 'the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry'³⁰⁴ was an extreme expression of doubts over the contemporary value of poetry. When Keats questions his vocation as a surgeon, Milnes comments that his subject was 'in the midst of that sad conflict between the outer and inner worlds, which is too often, perhaps always in some degree, the Poet's heritage in life' (I, 15). Milnes fears that imbalance between private desires and public usefulness that so many biographers of neglected subjects picked up and sought to remedy. Poetry, in the biography, is depicted in robust terms. The biographer insists that Keats's 'poetry never weakened his action, and his simple, everyday habits never coarsened the beauty of the world

³⁰³ Recorded in *William Allingham's Diary*, ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford (Carbondale, 1967), p. 205.

³⁰⁴ Jeremy Bentham, *The Rationale of Reward* (London, 1825), p. 206.

within him' (I, 75). This is an image of harmony between public and private spheres. It is coupled with a celebration of daily life and industry that has much in common with biographies of women and working-class subjects that sought to reassure the public that private longings could be coupled with communal duties and need not threaten the harmony and productivity of the nation. The public is certainly educated through the work, but it is also public taste that dictated on what terms the subject would be welcomed.

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The public response to Milnes's biography was overwhelmingly positive. Keats's friends were largely satisfied with the portrait,³⁰⁵ and many important men of letters, from Arthur Clough to Thomas Arnold, responded to the work. One of these was Tennyson, a Keats admirer and friend of Milnes. Tennyson wrote 'To -, after reading a life and letters', (1849) partly in response to Milnes's *Keats*.³⁰⁶ The poem is an attack on literary biography: it expresses the common idea that the genre has affinities with 'the scandal and the cry' and uses the image of the biographer who breaks 'lock and seal' and keeps 'nothing sacred'. To a reproach of the biographer for exploiting scandal Tennyson adds the contradictory idea that a writing life is an uneventful one, inappropriate for the genre: 'No public life was his on earth, / No blazon'd statesman he, nor king'. The criticism disregards the ever-growing taste for literary biography that demonstrated that, on the contrary, literary lives were full of interest.

The poem celebrates the private over the public. 'Unrecording friends' are valued, and tribute is paid to the 'silent voice', the 'little life' and the song that 'dies unheard'. The fact that Keats's name is not mentioned in the poem emphasises the concern with the hidden. This apparent celebration of neglect masks a more complex response to poetic fame. Tennyson's response to the biography inevitably involves a reflection on his own fame, as he compares

³⁰⁵ See Hyder E. Rollins, *The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers, 1816-1878* (Cambridge, 1948), 2 vols.

³⁰⁶ Lord Alfred Tennyson, 'To- After Reading a Life and Letters', *The Poems of Tennyson* (Harlow, 1987), vol.II, p. 293.

the 'laurel' Keats has won with his own. Yet the idea that Keats has 'made the wiser choice' in choosing neglect is ambiguous: Tennyson's rejection of contemporary recognition can be questioned, as can the idea that Keats chose his own neglect. The poem perpetuates the idea of neglect as a token of worth even as it uses the public form of a poetic address to express it, and confirms Tennyson's own fame in doing so.

The poem can be read as part of the growing tension between poets and their apparent commercialisation through literary biography. The genre appeared to trespass on one of the roles of poetry itself. Throughout the centuries, eulogies and other poetic tributes had been used to regulate and circulate poetic reputations. Tennyson's response involves a suspicion of the readers of biography, and a wariness of biography as a self-nominated cultural mediator.

Milnes's biography also influenced the self-representation and representation of poets – often very minor ones – in later nineteenth-century biography, and in particular in the life of Lewis Morrison-Grant (1872-1893), a Scottish poet who died young and imagined himself as one of the 'great unknown'.³⁰⁷ The biographer picks up this hint, and as the biography progresses the parallels with Keats increases, until it is declared that 'it is not yet fully known what has been accomplished by this solitary who in the beginning of his manhood fell, as Keats fell, on the threshold of a new era' (279). The talents of Keats and Morrison-Grant are of course very different, which recalls the fact that the biographer's powers are, naturally, limited in the extent to which they can prepare a public to receive a poet. The time must be opportune, but the poet must also be worthy. What is striking in this biography, however, is that the biographer lacks the confidence to describe her subject on his own terms, and relies far too heavily on the model provided by Monckton Milnes to make her claims convincing.

³⁰⁷ Jessie Anne Anderson, *Lewis Morrison-Grant: His Life, Letters and Last Poems* (London: Alexander Gardner, 1894), p. 230.

Thomas Carlyle's *The Life of John Sterling* (1851)

Readers of Monckton Milnes's biography would have found echoes of the life of John Keats in the story of the tubercular, albeit less talented, John Sterling. Thomas Carlyle's 1851 biography of his friend is a very different work from *The Life of Keats* – far less reliant on letters or other primary sources, more clearly opinionated, and more preoccupied with bringing out the artistic possibilities of biography as a genre. Both biographies, however, reflect on the strained relations between artist and public and use biography as a means of compensating for, or healing, such tensions.

It is John Sterling's confused quest for his vocation that Carlyle takes as his central theme: an image for the chaos of the times. Sterling, born in 1806, hesitated between taking up the law, politics, the church or literature as his profession. His revolutionary interests found an outlet in General Torrijos's attempted 1829 coup in Spain, which ended in a disaster that Sterling was fortunate to escape through a timely marriage. An attempted emigration to the West Indies did not last long. Sterling, on his return, was ordained deacon, but abandoned the Church after six months. As his pulmonary complaints increased, he turned to literature and produced articles, poetry, tales and a play that won little recognition. His life, punctuated by trips to warmer climates, ended in 1844, when he was aged only thirty-eight.

Thomas Carlyle's *The Life of John Sterling* grew out of two impulses: the desire to test the possibilities of the biographical genre, and the more personal desire to rehabilitate a friend. Three years earlier, Julius Charles Hare published Sterling's essays and tales alongside a short memoir.³⁰⁸ Hare had tutored Sterling at Cambridge and guided him through the process of entering the Church, and his memoir is concerned with claiming the centrality of religion to Sterling's life.

³⁰⁸ Julius Charles Hare, *Essays and Tales by John Sterling, collected and edited, with a Memoir of his Life by Julius Charles Hare, M.A., Rector of Herstmonceux* (London: John W. Parker, 1848), 2 vols.

It was in 1835 that Carlyle met Sterling, at the offices of John Stuart Mill. They became friends, and Sterling published an important discussion of *Sartor Resartus*. Carlyle saw in Sterling an example of the 'sincere man' who had the potential to be a hero,³⁰⁹ though he perceived Sterling's weaknesses – the faults of his works, the vacillations of his character. Though he was unsuccessful as a writer, some of the greatest names of the period were charmed by his personality and capacity for friendship. Sterling's friends were numerous in rejecting the central thesis of Hare's book. Encouraged by Sterling's brother Anthony, Carlyle set out to demonstrate that 'Artist not Saint was the real bent of his being' (164). Thus, as Arthur Stanley wrote, 'his story, with hardly an incident worth recording, has had the singular fate of being told by two of the most gifted men of his time'.³¹⁰ (The discrepancy increases when one considers that Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Stuart Mill also toyed with the idea of writing a Sterling biography). The uniqueness of Carlyle's work lies in the manner in which it takes the paradoxes of biography to its limits by using biography, that most publicizing of genres, as a means of rescuing a friend from distasteful public debate.

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Before the theological controversy had even begun, Carlyle had expressed a desire to write such a biography. Narrating the life of a friend who was also a failure enabled him to test the ideas on biography that he had begun to pronounce several years before. 'Why, indeed, any life at all of such a man?' asked Hepworth Dixon in *The Athenaeum*, adding that 'neither as a writer nor as a thinker can the late Mr. Sterling be held to have taken rank.'³¹¹ Carlyle, rather than avoid the problematical nature of his choice of subject, places Sterling's failures squarely at the heart of the work. Readers are informed that Sterling's 'character was not supremely original; neither was his fate in the world wonderful. What he did was

³⁰⁹ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 109.

³¹⁰ Anne Kimball Tuell, *John Sterling: A Representative Victorian* (New York, 1941), p. 1.

³¹¹ [Hepworth Dixon review], *The Athenaeum*, 1088 (October 18, 1851), p. 1088.

not supremely original; neither was his fate in the world wonderful. What he did was inconsiderable enough'. He even adds that Sterling's 'performance and real or seeming importance in this world was actually not of a kind to demand an express Biography' (7). The biographer signals clearly that the subject presents a contrast to traditional biographical great lives, but this lack of greatness is turned to positive account, as it releases new biographical possibilities.

Reviewers did not discuss the similarity of Carlyle's words in the biography to Samuel Johnson's almost exactly a century before. In 1750, Johnson famously wrote:

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. [...] [...] We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by dangers, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure.³¹²

Here is Carlyle, in the introduction to *The Life of John Sterling*:

I have remarked that a true delineation of the smallest man, and his scene of pilgrimage through life, is capable of interesting the greatest man; that all men are to an unspeakable degree brothers, each man's life a strange emblem of every man's (10).

Carlyle shared with Johnson a belief in biography's didactic potential. In 1848, Carlyle, in his journal, contemplated writing the 'picture of a gifted soul whom I knew and who was my friend. Might not many things withal be *taught* in the course of such a delineation?'³¹³ There is a shift in Carlyle's passage, however, from what is useful to what is interesting. Empathy, more than simple teaching, is the later biographer's concern. Didacticism and emotion were united in Johnson's *Life of Savage*, which has some similarities with Carlyle's *Life of John Sterling*. Both biographers were intimate friends with their subject, and there are strong echoes of Johnson's work as Carlyle and Sterling walk through London, the one condemned to poetic failure and an early death, the other destined for lionization.

³¹² Johnson, 'The dignity and usefulness of biography', pp. 318-23.

³¹³ Thomas Carlyle, Journal, 9 February 1848, quoted in James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of His Life in London* (London: Longmans Green, 1884), vol. I, p. 423.

Carlyle also took inspiration from Boswell, and in particular seized on a feature that he had greatly admired in the *Life of Johnson*: the description of a passing prostitute, that provided such a striking glimpse of parallel lives. Struggling lives make similarly short appearances throughout *The Life of John Sterling*, such as Sterling's friend Dr. Calvert or a Cornish miner and local worthy. Like the prostitute, they bring a glimpse of a greater humanity beyond Sterling's life; they also confirm the interest of 'every' man. Carlyle's biography unites a theoretical approach to biography with the desire to convey the wealth and diversity of humanity.

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Biography alone appears insufficient to convey this. Carlyle appeals to tragedy, and draws extensively on classical tragedy to depict his friend, a young hero fighting a noble but vain battle against forces outside his control. He organises the life of his subject into five acts, 'five swift flights, not for any high or low object in life, but for life itself' (176). The biographer functions as a tragic chorus, foreseeing but unable to alter events. As he describes Sterling's botched revolutionary attempts, the narrative is punctuated by the biographer's cries of 'Behold' (94) and 'Wo on it' (118). Carlyle had previously contemplated the democratisation of tragedy. In *The French Revolution* (1837), he describes the 'miserablest mortals, doomed for picking pockets, have a whole five-act Tragedy in them, in that dumb pain, as they go to the gallows, unregarded'.³¹⁴ The use of tragedy in these biographical and historical contexts is worth unpicking.

The work illustrates a recurrent feature in the depiction of inglorious subjects: the appeal to different literary genres. The more common pattern in biography is the affinity drawn by the biographer between his work and poetry – as with the appeals to Thomas Gray in lives of humble men, the evocation of Romantic poets in the lives of humble naturalists or

³¹⁴ Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, vol. II, p. 232.

the compiler of *Women of Worth* who called for sketches representing ‘the poetry and charm of everyday life’.³¹⁵ Yet in many cases, the use of generic terms such as ‘drama’ and ‘poetry’ by biographers and reviewers alike was simply shorthand for intensity of emotion and vivid style. This certainly applies to *The Life of Sterling*, with its skilful use of repeated phrases and imagery (such as meteors, moonshine and sunshine), which justifies William Henry Marquess’s description of the biography as a ‘heroic poem’.³¹⁶ The terms, however, are generally used indiscriminately: reviewers described Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (a work often compared to *The Life of Sterling*) in terms of its ‘pathos’ and ‘tragic interest’, and described it alternatively as a ‘poem-picture’, a ‘highly-wrought drama’ and ‘like a novel’.³¹⁷ These parallels betray an underlying conviction that emotions and empathy are better stirred through fiction than so-called reality. George Eliot’s plea to consider ‘the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes’³¹⁸ illustrates that generic terms were used freely and loosely. The literary forms are less important than the expanse of human experience they suggest.

Yet it is tragedy in particular that Carlyle is here drawn to. Though he argued elsewhere for the fertile combination of fact and poetry, this is downplayed here in favour of the tragic form. In his lectures on Shakespearean tragedy, A. C. Bradley argued that ‘the saying that every death-bed is the scene of the fifth act of a tragedy has its meaning, but it would not be true if the word ‘tragedy’ bore its dramatic sense’.³¹⁹ Yet here Carlyle does use the word ‘tragedy’ in precisely a dramatic manner, and structures his biography accordingly into acts, with a rise and fall, and the subject’s fate precipitated by a kind of tragic flaw. Carlyle even pauses in the narrative to exclaim: ‘Why, like a fated Orestes, is man so whipt

³¹⁵ [Anonymous], *Women of Worth*, p. v.

³¹⁶ William Henry Marquess, *Lives of the Poet: The First Century of Keats Biography* (London, 1985), p. 44.

³¹⁷ See chapter 2.

³¹⁸ Eliot, ‘The Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1985), p. 42.

³¹⁹ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 4.

by the Furies, and driven madly hither and thither, if it is not even that he may seek some shrine, and there make expiation and find deliverance?’ (119)

George Eliot provides a close parallel of Carlyle’s use of tragedy in her fiction, not only through such statements as that ‘the pride and obstinacy of millers and other insignificant people [...] have their tragedy’, but through her extensive use of Aristotelian notions of tragedy within her works.³²⁰ In ‘Notes on the Spanish Gypsy’, Eliot’s phrase ‘The dire strife/ Of poor Humanity’s afflicted will,/ Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny’ has obvious echoes with Carlyle.³²¹ Both writers reshape tragedy as a more democratic form. Carlyle does not go as far in *The Life of Sterling* as to combine tragedy and biography in the life of a peasant – his subject, though no aristocrat, is far less humble. Yet there is a similar impulse to generalise the idea of heroism. The amalgamation of genres leads to uncertain results. The appreciation of tragedy rests on the acknowledgement that the events depicted are fictional. Biography can turn to tragedy in order to incite intense emotions and a strong bond with the subject, yet there is a risk that the subject finally becomes distanced through such a close association with a fictional form.

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Indeed, Carlyle uses his biographical subject to express certain truths about his epoch. Sterling’s failings make him, for Carlyle, an apt representative of the times. If a world of ‘great men’ is what everyone should aspire to, the inglorious biographical subject seemed a more adequate image of the spirit of the age. Sterling is referred to as ‘this young man of the nineteenth century’ (163), and his life is ‘emblematic of that of his Time’ (343). Carlyle moves continuously between the specifics of Sterling’s life and ‘this unexampled epoch’ (44). It is, the biographer argues,

³²⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 172.

³²¹ ‘Notes on the Spanish Gypsy’, in J. W. Cross’s *George Eliot’s Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), vol. III, p. 44.

in the history of such vehement, far-shining and yet intrinsically light and volatile souls, missioned into this epoch to seek their way there, that we best see what a confused epoch it is (138).

The passage balances a sense of Sterling's importance, with echoes of heroism in the words 'missioned' and 'far-shining', yet the use of the plural alerts the reader to the more general significance of the subject's life. Carlyle uses his characteristic vehemence to depict the condition of the age of which Sterling is an image. It is a 'mad world' (50), a 'waste-weltering epoch' (51) in which 'old spiritual highways and recognized paths to the Eternal' are 'torn up and flung in heaps' (126).

The choice of literature by so many as an alternative to the old, vanished, certainties of the Church is for Carlyle yet another illustration of the confusion of the nineteenth century. The 'cramped, confused and indeed almost obsolete' professions of the Church, the Law and Medicine have become irrelevant. Literature has become the new, illusory, 'sanctuary':

Of all forms of public life, in the Talking Era, it was clear that only one completely suited Sterling, - the anarchic, nomadic, entirely aerial and unconditional one, called Literature. [...] As many do, and ever more must do, in these our years and times. This is the chaotic haven of so many frustrate activities; where all manner of good gifts go up in far-seen smoke or conflagration [...] (58).

The passage implicitly refers back to the famous portrait of Coleridge, the most eminent 'Talker' of his age, which occurs earlier in the biography. The depiction of 'Literature' echoes the terms used to describe Coleridge, with a similar condemnation. His 'moonshine' (81) echoes literature's 'aerial' qualities. The imagery of smoke picks up the language of fire that runs throughout the work and that, alongside images of water, and light and darkness, lends mythic proportions to Sterling's attempts to find his place in society. Carlyle's periodical wariness of literature is well documented, from his attempts to dissuade Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning from writing poetry, to his private self-interrogation in his

journals: 'Do I really love poetry? I sometimes fancy almost, not'.³²² The biography presents a division between powerful or attractive cultural institutions and the powerlessness of individuals circulating, or trapped, within them.

The battle between religion and literature, from Sterling's quest for a vocation to a more general state of alienation in society, is reflected in other, later, biographies of minor and neglected poets. The 1877 biography of the poet Edmund Armstrong is partly concerned with narrating the loss of faith that accompanied the development of the subject's poetic talents. Lewis Morrison-Grant, the Scottish poet who died at the age of twenty-one and modelled himself on Keats, was the subject of a moving though somewhat laboured biography which also records the subject's wavering between the Church and a poetic career. The work is of similar length to *The Life of Sterling* and depicts, with tragic overtones, the subject's recurring patterns of illness. It also takes as a core theme the subject's search for a profession. The work is replete with references to Carlyle, whom the poet had read in depth. In his copy of Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Morrison-Grant added an essay on 'The Hero Unknown', which the biographer quotes:

'The history of the world, the history of great men?' Nay, rather all that is worth recording of silent suffering and struggling ones, great or little outwardly to the world's view, but inwardly, indubitably great!'³²³

Morrison-Grant's is described as a 'voice in the wilderness'. The poet's Romantic sensitivity clashes with the realities of Victorian life.

Carlyle's biography explores the consequences of Romantic depictions of the artist as a figure detached from society. *The Life of Sterling* feeds into the contemporary interest in the lives of poets who succumbed to an early death. It was certainly read as such by many contemporaries. Reviewers saw parallels with Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), which

³²² Thomas Carlyle, 'Notebook Entry', 3 December 1826, in *Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York, 1878), p. 151.

³²³ Anderson, *Lewis Morrison-Grant*, p. 292.

commemorated Arthur Hallam, another minor poet who had died young. (Indeed, both Carlyle's biography and Tennyson's poem elegise a close friend who had once championed their future elegisers in important journal articles.) Thackeray's piece on the biography in *The Leader* evoked Sterling, Hallam, and Charles Buller (privately educated by Carlyle in Edinburgh), all Cambridge men who inspired strong friendships and had died young. These men were caught between the Romantic and Victorian periods. The imagery of youthfulness and illness accrues a different meaning when applied to the lives of unsuccessful and confessedly mediocre poets, as it becomes a symbol for the ineffectiveness of poetry in a more robust, industrial age.

The discussion of literature as a profession enters into this depiction. It is important that Sterling (and Carlyle when describing him) considered writing not as the outpourings of his soul but as a profession. The problems this new conception of literature raised are also discussed in the biography of the young Morrison-Grant, who

spoke of his wish to prove himself in all matters as practical and hard-working as others: and this was no doubt from the tendency of many persons to regard a young poet as an irresponsible, eccentric being who is disowned with rhyme in place of reason. He could at least, so he consoled himself, study for a London degree should he still think of literature as a profession (176).

The description suggests a tension between the enduring image of the poet as antisocial and unstable (which echoes Sterling's volatility) projected by the more sceptical critics of the Romantic poets, with the value of productivity brandished as a pillar of Victorian ideology ('practical', 'hard-working'). To survive in an age of productivity, literature has to be redefined as a profession, and it is against this equally fragile conception that Sterling hurls himself.

The new literary profession fails in part because of the public it purportedly sets out to serve. Monckton Milnes's biography of Keats projected a confrontation between the unjustly neglected poet and an uncomprehending public. In the biography of Keats, as in the life of

John Clare, the reading public was an entity to be educated by the biographer. In *The Life of Sterling*, the nature and role of the public is more diffuse.

The biography depicts an anonymous, often menacing, despising and despised audience. The condemnation of the reading public was a common trope amongst the works and letters of Romantic poets. In 1818, Keats wrote to Reynolds:

I have not the slightest feel of humility towards the public [...]. A Preface is written to the public – a thing I cannot help looking upon as an enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of hostility [...]. I cannot be subdued before them.³²⁴

As imagined by Keats, the public was also an anonymous group. Yet where Keats spoke as a defiant antagonist, often confident of his later rediscovery as an important poet by a more refined audience, Sterling assumes no such stance. For Carlyle, referring to Sterling's literary failures, the poet

submitted very patiently to the discouraging neglect with which it was received by the word: for indeed the 'Ye' said nothing audible, in the way of pardon or other doom (255).

Keats's insouciance has made way in Sterling to a state of dependence, with the public as a God-like figure dispensing humble aspirants to heaven or hell. Carlyle later uses the title of Sterling's poem *The Election* to compare the reading public with a political electorate, as the poet inquires 'of the public what its suffrage was' (279), with all the anxieties attendant upon the extension of the suffrage suggested by the comparison. The biography of Morrison-Grant is devoted to an account of the poet's struggles to achieve publication. One reviewer noted, with some justification, that 'some of the details [...] of the poor lad's efforts to get his volume of poems published by subscription might have been omitted'.³²⁵ Yet this repetitive description forcefully dramatizes the confusion of a late-Victorian poet relying upon Romantic notions of creativity, fame and publication, baffled by the well-oiled *fin-de-siècle*

³²⁴ Milnes, *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats*, vol. I, p. 120.

³²⁵ [Unsigned review], *Academy*, 47 (January 5, 1895), p. 11.

publishing and reviewing worlds. If the relations between artist and readers had become strained, what of the relationship between the biographical subject and readers?

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Carlyle's response in *The Life of Sterling* to an uninterested or disapproving public in a 'dislocated age' is bold. He takes the genre of biography, traditionally concerned with publicity and with strengthening the bond between subject and readers through the mediating efforts of the biographer, and reformulates it as a private act of compensation for a disappointing public sphere.

Biography provides a means of conferring a unity upon a life which was torn apart by the chaos of the nineteenth century. Unlike the baggy compiled volumes of Victorian biography, the style and structure of the work is given almost unprecedented attention. The five acts are played out across the three parts of the work, the first of which ends on a note of depression, the second with hope, and the third with death. There is a careful interweaving of the language of heroism ('adventure', 'pilgrimage', 'ardent', 'noble') with the fleeting (moonshine, meteors, wandering and flights). If Sterling himself failed as a writer, the biography is very much a 'literary' life.

Similarly, Carlyle reconciles the subject with himself. Throughout the work, Carlyle depicts Sterling as both childish and masculine. Sterling's childishness is predominantly invoked to pre-empt possible criticism ('if perceptibly or imperceptibly there is a touch of ostentation in him, blame it not; it is so innocent, so good and childlike', 61). The appellation serves to protect Sterling, yet in doing so risks distancing him by suggesting his frailty. To counter this, Carlyle brings in frequent affirmations of Sterling's 'manfulness' (299). As he determines to pursue his literary endeavours Sterling 'right manfully [...] walked his wild stern way towards the goal' (333). The unique moment during which these two aspects of the

subject are united is when he is in the presence of his biographer. The two ride over Hampstead or wander down Regent Street, and ‘Sterling was charming on such occasions: at once a child and a gifted man’ (247). The passage suggests that the biography is uniquely capable of providing the life with some harmony.

More importantly, however, the biographer rescues the subject from the vulgarities and indignities of the public sphere. Firstly, Carlyle acknowledges the theological debate from which his own biography has sprung before dismissing it. The controversy led to Sterling’s life being put on ‘trial’, at which Carlyle offered his own ‘testimony’. Yet the work gradually rescues Sterling from distasteful public debate. Carlyle asks:

What is he doing here in inquisitorial *sanbenito*, with nothing but ghastly spectralities prowling round him, and inarticulately screeching and gibbering what they call their judgment on him! (5).

The immediate reference is to the debate surrounding Sterling’s religious proclivities, with the reference to the garment worn by individuals accused by the Spanish inquisition, which changed in design according to whether the accused was penitent or impenitent. The passage contains wider echoes with the depiction of the public sphere in general.

It is not simply religious debate but any debate of Sterling’s merits which Carlyle condemns. Characteristically, he longs instead for the ‘Supreme Silences, who alone can judge of it or him’ (7). Inevitably, the biographer, involved in both a literary act and a counter-testimony to the interpretation of Sterling given by Hare, is hesitant, and notes his initial reluctance ‘to trouble the reviewers, and greater or lesser public’ (7) with his own biography. Indeed, as if to diminish his role as the facilitator in a transaction between Sterling and the public, he is masked behind the use of the present tense (‘the young ardent soul that enters on this world with heroic purpose [...]’, 50), a stylistic device that he had used extensively in *The French Revolution*.

A second, unusual, gesture is that Carlyle does not ask for greater public recognition for his subject. Unlike Martin, in his life of John Clare, or Milnes in his biography of Keats, or Gilchrist in his study of William Blake,³²⁶ he does not ask the reading public to reconsider their negative judgment. Though he suggests that the public may have been slightly too severe on Sterling, he is comfortable with the notion that Sterling's literary efforts do not rank particularly high. The only reconsideration offered is his own, an entirely personal regret at having dismissed his friend's works so harshly: 'after ten years' space, I find it, with a touching mixture of pleasure and repentance, considerably better than it then seemed to me' (279). Unusually, it is the biographer, rather than the public, who must act as penitent. Certainly, Sterling's works do not display the genius of his fellow biographical subjects. Yet biographers of far lesser talents did not shy from begging for the world's approval, or announcing that greater recognition was simply a matter of time.³²⁷ Carlyle's stance is part of a more determined effort to protect Sterling from the public sphere that treated him so roughly in his lifetime.

Most strikingly of all, towards the close of the biography, the biographer announces that Sterling's final 'stanzas of verse' to him shall be 'kept for myself alone', and are 'among my sacred possessions' (334). This is a startling rejection of the idea of the biographer as one who exposes, and entirely frustrates the reader's expectations of the function of biography. Carlyle's impulse is towards silence and secrecy, not display.

The biography becomes less a public defence than the enactment of a personal need. It has a chiasmic structure that creates a buffer between the subject and his public. The opening pages begin with an evocation of Carlyle's personal connection with Sterling before dwelling on the public debate that had unfortunately overshadowed his memory. In the final paragraphs, Carlyle again reflects on what the public has made of Sterling, before completing

³²⁶ See below.

³²⁷ See D.C. nos. 182; 119.

the work with a statement on his private relations with his friend. This last dimension is seen as infinitely more important:

Nay, what of men or of the world? Here, visible to myself, for some while, was a brilliant human presence, distinguishable, honourable and lovable amid the dim common populations [...] (344).

The biographer himself finds refuge from the 'dim common populations' through his subject. This fits in with Carlyle's broader belief that the purpose of biography, outlined most clearly in his essay 'Biography', is that of stimulating the 'loving Heart'.³²⁸

Though Carlyle, who stressed the didactic potential of *The Life of Sterling*, felt that readers could achieve a meaningful bond with his subject, it is above all *his* heart that is stimulated through the process. George Eliot had immediately recognised that this was indeed 'a labour of love',³²⁹ and readers were as moved, if not more, by the depiction of a caring, suffering Carlyle than of his bruised friend. As Robert Keith Miller argues, the work 'is related to the Victorian celebration of personal feeling and devotion as a last resort in a world where ignorant armies clash by night. The primary impulse behind *Sterling*, like *In Memoriam*, is love'.³³⁰ In Carlyle's poetical biography, as in Tennyson's biographical poetry, unease with the age is expressed through a personal act of grieving.

It is part of the power and indeed the paradox of the work that Carlyle uses a form dedicated to public display to create a work of intimacy in which the subject is gradually rescued from the public sphere and enclosed in a less unforgiving private relationship. A further paradox is that it was precisely the private relationship that attracted the curiosity of readers. *The Life of Sterling*, along with Smiles's naturalist biographies, is the strongest Victorian example of the life of an inglorious subject being written by an infinitely more famous biographer. George Eliot remarked in her review that 'in a book of such parentage we

³²⁸ Carlyle, 'Biography', p. 259.

³²⁹ [George Eliot review], *WR*, 62 (January 1852), pp. 247-9.

³³⁰ Robert Keith Miller, *Carlyle's 'Life of John Sterling': A Study in Victorian Biography* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1987), p. 50.

care less about the subject than about its treatment.’³³¹ Hepworth Dixon, himself a biographer, agreed that ‘probably nine out of every ten readers of this book will turn it over in the expectation of meeting Mr. Carlyle rather than Mr. Sterling in its pages.’³³² The presence of Carlyle’s name on the front page reversed the traditional biographical situation in which a lesser man writes the life of a Great Man. The fact that it was Carlyle writing the life of this unremarkable subject maintained the tension between exposition and concealment that runs throughout the work. Carlyle’s presence ensured that John Sterling, finally, would be remembered neither as a brave failure nor as an emblem of the nineteenth century, but purely as the improbable subject of a masterly biography.

Gilchrist’s *The Life of William Blake* (1863)

Two great admirers of *The Life of Sterling* were the newly wed Alexander and Anne Gilchrist. Anne wrote to a friend that ‘it is a book to vivify one’s very heart, revealing to us as it does the tender, gentle, beautiful, loving and lovable nature of *him* [Carlyle], the great, stern, earnest thinker, before whose burning intensity, like that of an old Hebrew prophet, as it has been said, we almost tremble.’³³³ Alexander Gilchrist became known to Carlyle through his 1855 life of the painter Etty, which prompted an appreciative letter from the Prophet to the biographer. Gilchrist, in turn, provided Carlyle with some assistance for his biography of Frederick the Great. The two men became neighbours when Gilchrist embarked upon the extensive research necessary to complete his biography of William Blake (1757-1827), the first full-length work on the painter-poet. It is unsurprising therefore that the *Life of William*

³³¹ [George Eliot review], *WR*, pp. 247-9.

³³² [Hepworth Dixon], *Athenaeum*, p. 1088.

³³³ Anne Gilchrist, quoted in *Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings*, ed. Herbert Harlakenden Gilchrist (London, 1887), p. 36.

Blake, published posthumously in 1863, is heavily influenced by Carlyle.³³⁴ There was a question, after Gilchrist's death, of asking Carlyle to pen the preface to the work, and, as Samuel Palmer noted, 'I never saw a *perfect* embodiment of Mr. C's *ideal* of a *man in earnest*, but in the person of Blake'.³³⁵

The biography was to a significant extent collaborative and its composition was tumultuous. Gilchrist, a thorough researcher, contacted as many of Blake's surviving friends and acquaintances as he could find. Richard Monckton Milnes, who had himself contemplated printing an edition of Blake's works in the 1850s, provided access to his significant collection of Blake material. The work was almost complete in 1861 and the first eight chapters in printed proofs when the biographer died of scarlet fever. It was earlier in the year that Gilchrist had met Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who owned the notorious Blake notebooks of which Gilchrist had been unaware. A Blake enthusiast, Rossetti persuaded Gilchrist's widow Anne (an author in her own right, biographer of Mary Lamb, and future close friend of Walt Whitman) to complete the work.

The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood provided her with their full support. Rossetti added a second volume to the work, which included a selection of Blake's writings, but also critical analysis of the work within the first volume, seamlessly intermingled with Gilchrist's narrative. The 'supplementary chapter', offering an overview of Blake's work, was entirely his and many of the illustrations that filled the work were of his choosing. William Gabriel Rossetti, whose help was similarly great though more difficult to pinpoint, provided the introduction to the 1906 edition.

Like Monckton Milnes's biography of Keats, Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* was a turning-point in the history of Blake's reputation, as the work's subtitle 'Pictor Ignotus' suggests.

³³⁴ Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus" with Selections from His Poems and Other Writings* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1863), 2 vols. Quotes are taken from the more recent edition, Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake* (New York, 1998).

³³⁵ Samuel Palmer, in A. H. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer* (London, 1892), p. 248.

Though some notices of Blake's life and work had previously been published,³³⁶ G. E. Bentley aptly labelled the years 1831-62 Blake's 'Forgotten Years'.³³⁷ Those who had paid attention to Blake had focused on his career as an artist, though Gilchrist sought to place an approximately equal emphasis on his visual art and his writing, which was even more 'unknown'.

Gilchrist's depiction of Blake as neglected is central to his biographical project. To the Carlylean vision of the unknown, sincere hero, Gilchrist also brings in the theme of the Romantic neglected artist, skilfully used by Monckton Milnes in his life of Keats. Like Keats, Blake is depicted as unappreciated in his own time; there is a similar concern with preparing a contemporary audience to receive and celebrate him. Like John Sterling, Blake is also 'child-like' (126), a 'Child Angel' (73). Gilchrist clearly drew on the relatively short but impressive body of biographies confronted with the restoration and reassessment of Romantic reputations. What he added to the theme was the sense that the unknown artist forms part of the unconscious of the nation, and waits to be faithfully unearthed and celebrated, and in this the biography anticipates Frederick Martin's *The Life of John Clare* (another Carlylean work), published two years later. Gilchrist, like Milnes and unlike Carlyle, is forthright in his intention to champion the neglected Blake. The case for a revaluation is made in a strikingly emotional manner that stresses the bond between biographer and subject, and between the subject and reader, in a way that reaches beyond the immediate question of Blake's fragile reputation.

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Gilchrist's *The Life of Blake* can be seen as one of the earliest 'quest biographies', of which the most notable examples are Symons's *Quest for Corvo* (1934) and Richard

³³⁶ Notably Allan Cunningham's 'William Blake' in *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (London: John Murray, 1830), vol. II, pp. 142-79.

³³⁷ G. E. Bentley, Jr. (ed.), *William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1975), p. 220.

Holmes's more recent biographical essays in *Footsteps* (1985). Many biographers had introduced themselves within their narrative when they had been personally acquainted with the subject – such was the very essence, for example, of the Boswellian mode of biography. It was more unusual to find the 'I' persona used, beyond the preface, when no such connection existed and to see the biographer at work to such an extent.

The biographer is intensely preoccupied with the physical evidence of the life and works of Blake. The work is as much a bibliographical study as a biographical one: the author is concerned with retracing books, cataloguing, and analysing the book as a physical object. The difficulty of accessing Blake's dispersed works and manuscripts is repeatedly stressed; Blake's *Poetical Sketches* are 'now so rare, that after some years' vain attempt, I am forced to abandon the idea of myself owning the book' (24). Gilchrist does not use footnotes but instead dwells on the nature and significance of his sources within the text. He describes volumes of Blake's works, notes that 'Mr. Monckton Milnes possesses a fine quarto, Mr. Linnell an octavo copy' (91), and states within the text that 'to Mr. Palmer I am indebted, among many other courtesies, for a copy of the first half of them' (99). Such comments were usually, as they are now, confined to prefaces or postscripts. Here, they work to reinforce the immediacy of the work to a Victorian audience, who is made to experience first-hand the difficulty of uncovering Blake.

Another unusual editorial decision was to reprint within the work, in their entirety, letters sent by old acquaintances of Blake to himself, the biographer. Such is the case, for example, with letters written by Samuel Palmer, which are printed complete with the date, 'Kensington, Aug. 23rd, 1855' (318). The decision to do so, rather than simply include passages relevant to Blake, seems odd unless taken as a conscious decision by Gilchrist both to show the biographer at work, and to bridge the distance between Blake and the Victorian readers and thus insist that a dialogue can be restored.

The biographer displays a transparency about his own approach to the work that can only be questioned with the evidence that both Gilchrist and Rossetti resorted to the frequent practice of modifying sources when it appeared convenient. The biography itself masks this, as it pretends to show its inner workings. Having quoted Blake's 'Annotations on Lavater' at great length, Gilchrist apologises to the reader who may doubt 'their intrinsic merit' but defends himself with an appeal to 'biographic duty' and the more personal argument that 'to me they seem mentally physiognomic' (68). The biographer presents himself as guileless and as an open mediator. He later announces: 'I will give an Argument of the Poem by way of indicating its tenor, and to serve as a bridge for the reader across the eddying stream of abstractions which make up this piece of poetic mysticism' (78). By warning the reader of his intention, rather than simply providing his analysis, he draws attention to himself as guide. He is the architect of the 'bridge' that is the biography.

More strikingly, Gilchrist goes further by projecting his own emotional involvement in his subject within the narrative. His tone shifts, at times pleading, at others defensive. His personal engagement is strongest when discussing Blake's works, which are evoked in impressionistic and deeply personal terms:

First of the Poems let me speak [...] To me many years ago, first reading these weird Songs in their appropriate environment of equally spiritual form and hue, the effect was as that of an angelic voice springing to oaten pipe, such as Arcadians tell of; or, as if a spiritual magician were summoning before human eyes, and through a human medium, images and scenes of divine loveliness (72).

Gilchrist reduces the alienation produced by these 'weird' Songs by introducing them through his own initial response. He does not talk of meaning but of 'effect', and indeed his critical language depends heavily, throughout, on comparison. The slight archaism of the opening phrase suggests that the biographer too might be a visionary addressing the world.

Such passages prepare the reader for the startling declaration towards the close of the biography, in a chapter that deals with the nature of Blake's visions, that 'so far as I am

concerned, I would infinitely rather be mad with William Blake than sane with nine-tenths of the world' (343). The strong presence of the biographer and the relationship he creates for himself with the subject within the work is rendered all the more complex since the idea that *The Life of Blake* was authored by Gilchrist can be contested. Certainly, Alexander Gilchrist began the project, gathered many of the sources and wrote much of the narrative. Yet between his death and the publication of the work were two years during which the biography was added to and modified by at least two hands, those of Anne Gilchrist and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and contributed to by others.

Significantly, these later contributors were keen to downplay their involvement. In her preface, Anne Gilchrist insisted that, when her husband died, 'The *Life* was then substantially complete [...] The main services, therefore, which the Work has received from other hands – and great they are – appear in the Second Part, and in the Appendix',³³⁸ which consisted of the descriptive catalogue of Blake's work. A letter from Anne to Dante Gabriel Rossetti expressed concern that 'the notion should get abroad' that Gilchrist left the work 'incomplete', and insists that insertions (quotations excluded) would only 'occupy half-a-dozen pages'.³³⁹ Alexander Gilchrist's name, accordingly, is the only name on the title page.

These descriptions are somewhat deceptive, though accounts of precisely how much each individual contributed can be debated. According to the *Rossetti Archive*, Dante Gabriel wrote the entirety of the discussion of *Jerusalem* in the twenty-first chapter, parts of the twenty-second chapter and comments in the twenty-ninth chapter on Blake's Notes to Reynolds's *Discourses*.³⁴⁰ The first person is used in these passages ('the *Jerusalem*, so far as I can understand it, is an allegory', 207), but masks a more diffuse writing persona. A letter from Anne Gilchrist to William Rossetti in 1862 asks for help with filling in 'some blanks'

³³⁸ Anne Gilchrist, 'Preface to the First Edition', *The Life of William Blake* (1998), p. xiii.

³³⁹ Anne Gilchrist to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 2 May 1863, *Rossetti Papers, 1862 to 1870* (London, 1903), p. 25.

³⁴⁰ See www.rossettiarchive.org.

where 'should be some brief description of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Book of Ahania*, *The Song of Los*, *Asia*, and *Africa*'.³⁴¹ Deborah Dorfman, in *Blake in the Nineteenth Century*, argues that 'D. G. Rossetti's contributions to Gilchrist's *Life* tended to Gothicize Gilchrist's already remote hero'.³⁴² Rossetti also appears to have selected many of the book's illustrations and selections from the poems, a crucial role, since an important aspect of the work was to disseminate the previously unattainable works of the subject.

Beyond the textual interest of these interventions, they reveal a concerted effort to give the idea that there was one biographer acting as the saviour and promoter of one subject. In his 1906 preface, William Gabriel Rossetti wrote that 'Gilchrist was the first successful champion of the cause', and 'rescued the artist from oblivion at a moment when the dark waters had nearly closed over him'.³⁴³ Both Gilchrist's own remarks within the biography, and the statements of those who sought to stress his role to the detriment of later contributors, express the need for the close, emotional relationship between the biographer and his subject.

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If the biographer is presented as a devotee to a perilous cause, strong demands are also placed on the reader. There is a regular pattern, in lives of obscure or neglected subjects, of biographers straining to provide a 'bridge' between the readers and the subject. Gilchrist takes this notion to unusual extremes. Many common biographical tricks are used. Allegations made against the subject are carefully dismantled. As with Keats, Blake was clearly not so obscure that negative stories did not circulate around him. Just as Milnes corrects the myth of a weak and self-indulgent Keats destroyed by a review, so does Gilchrist confront Blake's supposed madness, as Frederick Martin would with John Clare. Gilchrist summarises the debate in the chapter 'Mad or Not Mad?', and provides the anticipated answer 'not mad'.

³⁴¹ Anne Gilchrist to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 22 May 1862, *Rossetti Papers*, p. 6.

³⁴² Deborah Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet from Gilchrist to Yeats* (London, 1969), p. 81.

³⁴³ William Gabriel Rossetti, 'Preface', *The Life of Blake* (1998), p. x.

Gilchrist's solution to many of the claims made against Blake is to describe him as 'eccentric'. The biographer clearly relies on the idea of the 'eccentric' also used by William Jolly to describe the naturalist John Duncan, and that Leslie Stephen would later use in the *DNB*, that involved associating eccentricity with sincerity and nobility of spirit. Because Blake was a 'visionary' (150), he 'was fretted into greater eccentricity by his age' (172). The reader acting as jury to the writer's defence lawyer is not an unusual biographical feature.

In another effort common to these Victorian biographies reassessing Romantic 'obscures', Gilchrist stressed those features of the subject that might appeal to a Victorian audience. Blake's repudiation of late eighteenth-century artistic standards is stressed, with the attendant implication that a contemporary audience might approve this denunciation of 'the age of "polished phraseology and subdued thought"' which contrasts with Blake's 'unforced simplicity' (24). (The idea of the 'simplicity' of Blake's works may, however, easily be queried.) His love of children is repeatedly invoked as a symbol of this healthy simplicity. Similarly, Gilchrist, despite evidence challenging this, praises Blake for placing small stock in worldly success: 'Blake, by the way, talked little about "posterity"' (206). The biographer also pays tribute to the Victorian God of work. In a Smilesian passage, Gilchrist notes his 'indefatigable industry. [...] He cared not for recreation. [...] Work itself was pleasure' (267). The fact that reviewers laid great stress on the exemplarity of the narrative indicates Gilchrist's success in the process of adapting the subject to his audience. The 'neglected' Romantic poets declared their belief in educating an audience that would be able, in the future, to appreciate their work. Biographers, however, often felt that success was more likely if the poet could meet them half way.

Alongside the more intellectual demands made on the readers, Gilchrist angles his biography towards the ever-increasing contemporary passion for literary tourism. The reader is directed to Blakean 'haunts'. Blake 'lodged at No. 28, (now a cheese-monger's shop, and

boasting three brass bells), not many doors from Oxford Street on the right-hand side, going towards that thoroughfare' (61). The visitor of Felpham is invited to combine curiosity with an 'especially pleasant summer-walk [which] is that by footpath to the village of Walberton, some five miles northward' (162). The more scholarly-minded reader 'who wishes to study Blake as a colourist has a means of doing so [...] by going to the Print Room at the British Museum, which is accessible to any one who takes the proper course to gain admission' (393). One reviewer objected to this drive to 'describe every locality which our hero has lived in or visited.'³⁴⁴

The reader is made to see clearer into Blake's life and environment; a similar attempt is made to guide the reader through the maze of Blake's works. Monckton Milnes quoted extensively from Keats's poems and letters, but offered few critical commentaries of his own. Carlyle offered a similarly restrained appreciation of Sterling's more meagre efforts. Gilchrist, in contrast, displays a far greater eagerness in elucidating the works, even though he senses that Blake, like Keats, may be above all an 'Artist's Artist' (42). Gilchrist confronts directly the sheer impenetrability of much of Blake's work. He comments, for example, that 'the *Milton*, as I have hinted, equals its predecessor in obscurity' (216). The 'obscurity' of the works is made to mirror the 'obscurity' of the man, and the process of engaging with them is presented as similar. The biographer, as far as he can, acts as guide. He summarises complicated passages of the *Book of Thel* into a clearer 'Argument' (78). More reprehensibly, both Gilchrist and Rossetti tampered with their sources to make Blake's work more accessible to readers. On 27th August 1861, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who had begun to transcribe passages from his copy of Blake's *Notebook*, sent Gilchrist a letter with passages from

³⁴⁴ BEM, p. 293. Carlyle exploited this at length in *The French Revolution*.

'Auguries of Innocence, omitting parts & transposing others so as (to my thinking) the better to make its merits tell. I send it you in case you should agree with me & adopt the version'.³⁴⁵

The biographer also flatters the reader, and plays with his desire to be considered an artistic connoisseur, rather than one blind to Blake's genius. The biographer notes that 'to those disposed to judge a work of art vulgarly by what the eye merely can see, instead of by the emotions aroused, it may look like gross exaggeration to speak of grandeur in so rude and slight a work' (157). The dissenting reader exposes himself to charges of superficiality and vulgarity.

What Gilchrist offers the reader above all, however, is not analysis of the works but an intuitive approach to Blake, whether as artist or as poet. The biographer often declares his inability to convey a sense of the works:

His Design can ill be translated into words, and very inadequately by any engraver's copy. His Poems, tinged with the very same ineffable qualities, obstructed by the same technical flaws and impediments, are as it were a semi-utterance snatched from the depths of the vague and unspeakable (4).

Blake's art is given an otherworldly quality (with the paradoxical idea of the 'unspeakable', 'ineffable' qualities of a written poem), and, Gilchrist implies, must be experienced rather than discussed. Again, the biographer notes that 'criticism is idle. How analyse a violet's perfume, or dissect the bloom on a butterfly's wing?' (11). Such comments invite the reader to set off on his own journey of discovery rather than depend entirely on the biography.

Gilchrist asks the reader to take the Carlylean idea of developing the imaginative empathy through biography further. So that the reader may avoid misconstruing Blake,

frankly to enter into the full simplicity and *naïveté* of Blake's character, calls for the exercise of a little imagination on his [the reader's] part. He must go out of himself for a moment, if he would take such eccentricities for what they are worth, and not draw false conclusions. If he or I – close-tethered as we are to the matter-of-fact world – were on a sudden to wander in so bizarre a fashion from the prescriptive proprieties of life, it would be time for our friends to call in a doctor, or apply for a commission *de*

³⁴⁵ Fredeman, William E (ed.), *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Woodbridge, 2002), vol. II, p. 61; p. 65.

lunatico. But Blake lived in a world of Ideas; Ideas to him were more real than the actual external world (115).

The reader is made to experience a range of perspectives and potential self-alienation ('he must go out of himself'). To read this biography, in a strong rejection of the autobiographical mode, is to lose the self entirely. The biographer moves from addressing the reader as a separate entity towards uniting him closely with himself, with a tone of cheerful bonhomie. The reader becomes at once the subject and the biographer. The ideal reader must also possess something of the visionary:

To *go with* Blake, it almost required that a man should have the mind of an artist – and an artist of a peculiar kind – or one strongly in unison with that class of mind (359).

Gilchrist prepares the reader for this imaginative flight by stimulating it throughout the text.

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These combined efforts to bring the subject closer to the readers reveal the core impetus of Gilchrist's biography. Gilchrist gives national and collective resonances to Blake's story. The biography is saturated with images of decay, the transitory, and fading reputations. An *ubi sunt* theme is deployed throughout the narrative, recurring as an elegiac refrain. Gilchrist describes some of the literary circles in which Blake moved, before exclaiming:

Good heavens! what a frowsy, drowsy, "party sitting in a parlour," *now* "all silent and all damned" (in a literary sense), these venerable ladies and great literary luminaries of their day, ladies once lively and chatty enough, seem to an irreverent generation, at their present distance from us (47).

There is a Villon-like echo in the image of vanished ladies. Like Carlyle, the biographer frequently intervenes with chorus-like exclamations ('But alas!', 'Alas! for tenure of mortal Fame!', 44; 'What has become of these, I wonder?', 236). Individuals who are introduced in the narrative are almost consistently categorised according to whether they gained or lost fame, or remained obscure their entire lives ('Among Blake's fellow-exhibitors,' states Gilchrist, 'it is now curious to note the small galaxy of still remembered names [...]

sprinkling the mob of forgotten ones', 58). There is a further Carlylean touch in many of these passages demonstrating an awareness of those who were 'not great and famous, but nameless and unremembered' (196). The very physical environment that Gilchrist evokes is profoundly unstable, as he lays an insistent emphasis upon the destruction of buildings and the evolution of villages and towns ('The street has since been partly re-built, partly renamed; the whole become now sordid and dirty', 102). It is as if the act of rescuing Blake from persistent neglect could form a way of protesting against the ravages of time, and the reader is offered a chance to impose his will on a disturbingly unstable environment.

The biographer seeks to construct an even closer bond between Blake and the reader.

Gilchrist repeatedly strives to involve the reader, as in his insistence that

these are not merely *exercises* of art, to be coldly measured by the foot-rule of criticism, but truly inventions to be read and entered into with something of the spirit which conceived them (243).

The idea that criticism might be insufficient to approach such works as Blake's forms part of Gilchrist's larger reflection on how national tastes develop. The passage expresses a traditional division between rationality and imagination. This echoes Gilchrist's conception of the biography, which is not intended as a collection of facts, or the presentation of a life to be 'coldly measured'. Instead, the biographer demands that the reader commune with its subject. The passage also reveals an interest in origins and the conception of art. To understand the subject one must go back to the very source of the art, though the meaning that can be found there is elusive, always slightly beyond reach.

Having described his own reaction to Blake's works ('the effect was as that of an angelic voice springing to oaten pipe [...]', 72), Gilchrist makes a revealing statement:

As we read, fugitive glimpses open, clear as brief, of our buried childhood, of an unseen world present, past, to come [...]. We encounter familiar objects, in unfamiliar, transfigured aspects, simple expression and deep meanings, type and antitype (73).

The use of the pronoun 'we' is a common stylistic feature of the biography, which further unites biographer and reader in the quest to uncover Blake. The biography also becomes a place for the reader to encounter his own autobiography, as the subject is placed at the heart of the reader's own life. An enthusiastic writer in *The Spectator* was entirely responsive to Gilchrist's attempts to make his subject appear both obscure and yet already, almost mythically, familiar. The reviewer writes that

many persons who will not know even his *name* at all may remember the quaint but forcible plates in a didactic little children's novel in three small volumes, called "Elements of Morality," which was translated from the German somewhere about 1790 for the benefit of our fathers' and mothers' childhood [...].³⁴⁶

Blake's lack of recognition is set against a sense that he was always hovering in the background, and can be recovered, like a memory, through communal re-examination. The reviewer pursues that a reader and viewer of Blake will gain 'some things as he first knew them, not encumbered behind the days of his life; things too delicate for memory or years since forgotten'.³⁴⁷ Blake appears as a mythical undercurrent in the collective psyche: to recover Blake is to recover oneself. Blake is absorbed within the Pre-Raphaelite 'nostalgia for an idealised 'Arcadian' past',³⁴⁸ and these mythical overtones recall Frederick Martin's attempts to interweave John Clare's life with that of the nation and its cultural heritage. For William Gabriel Rossetti, Gilchrist's biography acted as a psychological release, as the nation began to unearth and release buried treasures ('the despised pictures emerge from the cellars and attics where they have spent the greater part of a century', v).

This association of Blake with the emotional heart of the nation enables the biographer to build a stronger case for his reintegration into the canon. Though Gilchrist's attitude towards the canon, and above all towards those who determine it, is ambiguous, he makes it

³⁴⁶ [Unsigned review], *The Spectator*, 1847 (November 21, 1863), p. 2771.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 2773.

³⁴⁸ Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 32.

clear from the opening of the biography that Blake belongs inside the cultural institutions that had so far neglected him:

From nearly all collections or beauties of “The English Poets,” catholic to demerit as these are, tender to the expired and expiring reputations, one name has been hitherto perseveringly exiled. Encyclopaedias ignore it. The Biographical Dictionaries furtively pass it on with inaccurate despatch, as having some connexion with the Arts. With critics it has had but little better fortune (1).

The work is peppered with such complaints. There is a constant allusion to the absence of Blake’s works in ‘our Museum library’ (38), and a lament that ‘not one of these often invaluable examples of rare masters was secured for the nation’ (355) by the National Gallery. Gilchrist goes on to mention Allan Cunningham’s sketch and Charles Robert Leslie’s *Handbook for Young Painters* (1855) as exceptions, yet his claims on the neglect of Blake overstate the case, as more recent studies of Blake’s reputation during the ‘forgotten years’ have demonstrated.³⁴⁹ The biographer is being purposefully confrontational, though the targets of his criticism are unclear. Gilchrist makes an unwarranted division between books and critics, as if poetical collections and Encyclopaedias developed independently of artistic and literary critics who have also ignored it. The depiction increases the impression of a cause needing to be championed.

It is striking that Gilchrist, in order to stress his own subject’s neglect, depicts the genre of collective biography as almost excessively democratic, ‘catholic to demerit’ and ‘tender of the expired and expiring reputations’. This was certainly not the consensus in the 1860s, when readers of such works still largely expected to find lists of great names, and when Leslie Stephen began working on the *DNB* in the 1880s, the debate on whether collective biography was essentially a democratic or an elitist form was by no means resolved.

³⁴⁹ See Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century*.

There is a tension within and surrounding the biography regarding who moulds the national canon. The biography is replete with attacks on misguided critics, and Gilchrist's attempts to present Blake apart from the cold 'foot-rule of criticism' (243) has been noted. Gilchrist takes some pride in presenting Blake as an outsider, as 'in an era of academies, associations, and combined efforts, we have in him a solitary, self-taught, and as an artist, *semi-taught Dreamer*' (3). If both critical standards and cultural institutions are lamentably conformist, remaining on the margins is an indicator of quality. Gilchrist's sustained attacks on such institutions, that Monckton Milnes largely avoids, and that Carlyle redirected into a more general commentary on contemporary decay, lead his own biographical endeavours into a paradox. Since Blake's style is '*sui generis* as no artist's ever was' (3), what can the canon make of him?

In fact, Gilchrist cannot entirely avoid paying tribute to the canon that, ultimately, he desires Blake to be welcomed into, but instead offers a compromise. The work prefigures the more scholarly biographies such as the *English Men of Letters* in repeatedly drawing attention to literary contexts:

In 1787, the year in which Blake's hand engraved the *Songs of Innocence*, Wordsworth was finishing his versified *Evening Walk* on the Goldsmith model; Crabbe ("Pope in worsted stockings," as Hazlitt christened him), famous six years before by his *Village*, was publishing one of his minor quartos, *The Newspaper* [...] (77).

Gilchrist juxtaposes literary (or artistic) events without offering further commentary on the relation between them: Blake can thus preserve his unique status whilst being reintegrated within the company of names that have endured. Yet even then Gilchrist swerves at intervals from his insistence that Blake 'was placed above all need or inclination to borrow from others' (53) to trace connections with other poets. He looks to Blake's contemporaries ('In a few of the poems, the influence of Blake's contemporary, Chatterton [...] is visible', 26) to antecedents ('parallels may be found among the lyrics of the Elizabethan age', 25) and future

disciples ('those succeeding British artists who have shown unmistakably something of his influence in their works', 397). Without diminishing Blake's originality, such statements aim to initiate a critical discussion of Blake's cultural importance and insist upon his continued relevance.

Yet the first parallel that the biographer offers with his subject is to a fictional character. Gilchrist's choice of the title of Robert Browning's poem 'Pictor Ignotus' as the subtitle to the biography (together with a short quote from the poem before the title page), shows an interest in neglect as a theme beyond Blake's individual case. There are obvious parallels between Blake as Gilchrist presents him and Fra Bartolomeo, the monastic, unknown painter loathe to place his works in contact with the public, and deeply suspicious of worldly fame. It is a curious comparison for Gilchrist to make, as Blake was reproached for expressing the bitterness that lies at the heart of Browning's poetic monologue. Blake, unlike the poem's speaker, did not betray his own desires by painting monotonous, traditional paintings. The relationship between poetry and biography is tightened as Browning himself relied on Vasari's biographical collection *The Lives of the Artists* (1550) for his monologue, as with 'Fra Lippo Lippi' and 'Andrea Del Sarto'. The poem, like the biography, is also a rejection of standards of art established by individuals in power. The lines that Gilchrist singles out,

The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart

are again a curious choice.³⁵⁰ They suggest an embracing of neglect as a form of artistic self-protection that contrasts with the biography's concerns, and create a parallel between the monastery and the biography as a place of protection. Whereas Browning's poem is concerned with concealing, however, Gilchrist's work is an act of display.

³⁵⁰ Robert Browning, 'Pictor Ignotus', *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning* (Oxford, 1991), vol. IV, pp. 26-30.

Gilchrist succeeded in creating a new interest in Blake: critics were largely pleased to be invited to discover a new genius. Blake's name began to circulate freely in exhibitions, articles and full-length works such as Swinburne's *William Blake: a Critical Essay* (1868), which began as a lengthy review of Gilchrist's biography. When the second edition of the work appeared in 1880, the subtitle '*Pictor Ignotus*' could be dropped. It is often difficult to gauge precisely the influence of a biography in forging or reshaping a reputation, as there may already be an undercurrent preparing the ground for his celebration, as with Keats. Gilchrist's work, however, undoubtedly provided an important turning point. It is a testimony to his success that, today, Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* is, along with Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the Victorian literary biography most readily available in print.

To some extent, the biography is presented as a genre that can function as an alternative to other canonising institutions. This is illustrated above all in the role Gilchrist plays to consolidate Blake's reputation as an artist. The unusually large number of illustrations and rich reproductions signal the biographer's efforts to move his work beyond traditional biography. In collecting previously dispersed poetry and engravings, and linking them in a vivid narrative, the work functions as an accessible, portable exhibition: a literary museum. Also unusually, the extremely personal access that Gilchrist provides to the poetry stimulates the idea of individuals with whom the nation forges an emotional bond that cannot be accounted for in studies and critical accounts. The intermingling of canonisation and the reader's emotional bond with biographical subjects looks forward to the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Late-century literary biography and inglorious writers

With Frederick Martin's *The Life of John Clare*, published two years later in 1865, came the last of the substantial Victorian biographies that called for a revision in status of

individuals that are now considered major Romantic poets. (Carlyle's *Life of John Sterling* stands apart from these, as it is more concerned with submitting the consequences of Romantic ideas of the poet to scrutiny.) All of these works express a rift between the poet and society that biography went some way towards healing.

Yet not all biographies of little-known writers maintained a vision of the alienated artist, or even presented neglect as a force to be countered. Works that sought instead to reinforce the poet's ties with his community appeared with increasing frequency in the later Victorian period, though earlier examples can be found.³⁵¹ Such works tend to be short and predominantly anecdotal, with only a small emphasis placed on the poetry.

The most successful of these is perhaps *Bernard Barton and His Friends: a Record of Quiet Lives* (1893), the first biography by the Charles Lamb scholar Edward Verall Lucas. Bernard Barton (1784-1849) was a Quaker poet whose life, like John Clare's, had spanned both the Romantic and Victorian periods. His principal claim to fame had been his friendship with Charles Lamb. The tone of the work is entirely different from the lives of Keats, Sterling and Blake and privileges calm – 'wholesome sweetness' and 'serenity'³⁵² – over any kind of tension. Indeed, the work is above all concerned with reconciliation: between poets and their public, and readers and biography, and asserts the harmonising potential of biography.

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The ideal poet in Lucas's biography of Bernard Barton is not an antisocial or alienated individual but on the contrary a social poet. Lucas explicitly positions Barton's life and artistic temperament in opposition to the stereotype of the Romantic artist. The biographer warns the reader that

³⁵¹ See D.C. nos. 80; 135; 164; 170; 193; 202.

³⁵² Edward Verall Lucas, *Bernard Barton and His Friends: A Record of Quiet Lives* (London: Edward Hicks, Jr., 1893), p. 11.

in the pages that follow he need look for none of those extremes or eccentricities that so often make biographies hardly less piquant than romance. He will find himself in the presence of a plain man, unselfish and undistinguished [...].

But the reader if he be wise will find ample compensation for the absence of spiced anecdote and all the brilliances which have come to be associated with the literary career in the insight he will gain into a contented mind (28).

The passage is an important one that negotiates many of the tensions surrounding both literary biography and the representation of the poet. In marked contrast to the biographies of Keats or Blake, artistic obscurity is a state that needs no redress but is associated instead with moral worth. (It is worth noting that eccentricity here is not constructed as a symbol of sincerity as with many biographies but instead of excess.) The presentation of the biography has much in common with the biographies of working-class poets, naturalists or other amateurs, that sought to stress above all contentedness of mind. Like them, this subject's life offers 'charm and instruction' (11). This is also the case for similar biographies of minor, local poets where poetic endeavours occasion less praise than a life that can 'interest, edify, and encourage' or that 'can be held up as an example of honest and laborious endeavour in the service of others'.³⁵³ Such comments create a distance from the cult of celebrity and the lionization of artists, partially fuelled (ironically) by biography itself.

Lucas's description of his work provides a reflection on contemporary literary biography. During the nineteenth century, this sub-section of biography had become increasingly marked by scandal. There had always been objections to the investigation of the private lives of authors, but these intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century as the industry of literary tourism and indeed of biography developed. The publication of James Anthony Froude's four-volume 'warts and all' biography of Carlyle between 1882 and 1884 launched a controversy that lasted well into the next century. Lucas's life of Barton was published the same year as the publication of Flaubert's letters, which prompted Henry James

³⁵³ Thomas Raban, *The Aged Pilgrim and his songs: Or, memoir and poetical remains of the Rev. James Raban* (London: Ward & Co., 1852), p. vi; Thomas Beggs, *Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mr. Alderman John Guest, F. S. A., of Rotherham* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1881), p. vi.

to lament how the novelist had been ‘dragged after death into the middle of the marketplace’.³⁵⁴ Lucas offers his own protest over a genre that could slip from fact to the titillations of ‘romance’ (15). The work is one that puts forward a model of respectable literary biography. The publication of uneventful lives of contented authors was one reaction to the controversies surrounding the genre.

Lucas works hard to avoid any implication that his literary biography might act as a betrayal of the subject’s privacy. He collapses the distance between subject, reader and biographer, and encourages the reader to feel entitled to his intrusion into the life. Strikingly, the biographer attempts to abolish temporal distance:

Let us suppose that the invitation is addressed to us. At the door our host greets us heartily with a warm hand-shake that does not loosen until he has drawn us well within his walls [...] He takes his own chair – one with spreading arms that welcome their owner as he welcomes us. We sit on the other side of the hearth. The conversation, enlivened with anecdote, touches rustic humours, the last new book from London, Woodbridge gossip, the letter just received from a distant correspondent (50).

It is the subject himself who draws in, and even coerces, his biographer and readers within his private sphere. The biographer disappears as the writer of the narrative and stands on equal footing with the reader. The biographer and subject are by no means enemies but intimate friends. This effect is achieved through recourse to the cosy, informal tone that had become popular in journalistic accounts of interviews with famous writers, where an author discussed his work over a cup of tea. The work is concerned with healing the divide between a poet and his audience. It resists the notion that, as Leo Braudy writes, ‘coolness, evasion, and distance were becoming a vital part of the appeal made by the most successful public men’ since the Romantics.³⁵⁵ It is also concerned with presenting the genre of literary biography itself in a more reassuring light. Biography, in the process, is no longer the formidable two-tomed mausoleum enshrining Great Men but a chatty, middlebrow genre that places great value upon

³⁵⁴ Henry James, in *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism* (London, 1963), p. 139.

³⁵⁵ Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown*, p. 417.

accessibility – a fluid genre that can circulate easily throughout society and act as a binding force.

As part of his attempt to reconcile the poet and society, Lucas builds a case for the better integration of poetry in daily life. In doing so he draws on contemporary pleas for the democratisation of poetry. Keble gave the title of poet not ‘to him who publishes his verse with great popular acclaim, but rather to the man who meditates the Muse at home for his own delectation and solace.’³⁵⁶ Poetry becomes divorced from its more narrow generic definitions, but evokes a way of life, with an implicit protest against contemporary materialism. Lucas’s almost overly quaint and picturesque description of Woodbridge society, with its general good humour and sun-bathing pensioners, echoes the poetry of everyday life to be found, for example, around Amos Barton or the citizens of Cranford. The poet has lost his status as a legislating figure to be worshipped from afar; instead, he appears as a familiar presence, woven into the texture of society.

Where Lucas’s presentation (and that of the biographers with a similar perspective) differs from George Eliot and the biographers she inspired is in his anti-intellectual stance. The biographer notes with approval that his subject wisely enjoyed ‘familiar rather than majestic literature’ (54). He appreciates that Barton’s Woodbridge ‘avoided harm from the torrents of *osophies* and *isms* which had beaten upon less fortunate districts of the country’ (35). Again, ‘it would not be surprising to find that in the sum of things the radiation of good humour in Woodbridge is of more important than the composition (say) of many “Queen Mabs”’ (47). Social harmony is prized above intellectual advances; the safe and familiar is valued above genius. Such passages echo Robert Southey’s insistence in *The Lives of Uneducated Poets* of the social value of mediocre poetry. This praise of mediocrity is echoed

³⁵⁶ John Keble, *Keble’s Lectures On Poetry, 1832-1841* (Oxford, 1912), vol. I, p. 317.

in many other biographies. One biographer urges his readers to avoid being ‘too exacting’ respecting his subject’s verse. Another places greater emphasis on the subject’s temperance work than on his writing. To this extent, these biographies have much in common with biographies of female writers.³⁵⁷

Furthermore, any suspicion that the poet might become ‘tragically ineffectual’ is removed. Lucas, like many of these biographers, pays tribute to core bourgeois Victorian values. Whilst the subject takes pleasure in writing verse, he also contributes to the national wealth as a banker. (Other subjects include a poet-clergyman, a poet-alderman, and a poet-bookseller.) Accordingly, very little attention is given to the question of the poet’s reception and his relationship with the public sphere. Unlike the biographies by Milnes, Carlyle, Gilchrist and Martin, there is no interest in patronage, the difficulties of achieving a wide audience, or the pitfalls of publication and circulation. Like Carlyle, Lucas and his fellow biographers see the value of protecting their subjects from the public sphere. They diminish the idea of any public debate surrounding the subjects, and approve the poets’ removal from the chaos of the public sphere. (One biographer considers with great scepticism the effects of the rise of the newspaper on healthy social intercourse.³⁵⁸) Unlike Carlyle, however, the works evoke the possibility of a snug and sheltered life, in which the poet has an integral part to play.

The minor poet serves, in Lucas’s biography as in many works of this type, as a kind of mascot that provides an identity for communities. Place is central to these works: many of the titles stress the subject’s provenance, such as the *Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mr. Alderman John Guest, F. S. A., of Rotherham* (1881). In the biography of a minor clergyman-

³⁵⁷ Richard S. Blair, *A Memoir of Billy Durrant, Local Preacher, Bookseller, and Poet, compiled from his letters, journals, and poems* (London: Ralph Fenwick, 1884), p. 13; Beggs, *Mr. Alderman John Guest*.

³⁵⁸ Mt. A. S. Cyrus, *George Beattie, of Montrose. A Poet, A Humourist, And a Man of Genius* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1863).

poet, the biographer rapidly notes that ‘Olney in Buckinghamshire – where the memory of James Raban is still fragrant – is of itself by no means an interesting place; but as long as time shall continue, the name of Olney will be dear to the man of feeling, subdued and moulded according to religious truth’.³⁵⁹ The stress on community ties and on continuity rather than disruption is particularly strong in the biography of Bernard Barton. Barton, whose ‘poetry is to-day unknown’, serves as an emblem for his town, recalling values of ‘cheerfulness, simplicity and wholesome sweetness’ in the midst of ‘this hurried, incomplete day of ours’ (11). Barton functions as part of the local mythology that helps to create continuity between past and present. He is ‘the gentle bard of Woodbridge’:

The people of Woodbridge felt the loss of their poet very deeply. Bernard Barton was so completely an integral part of the town, had so long “radiated good humour” therein, that it seemed impossible to realise that no longer would he be seen standing in the bank doorway signalling greetings to his passing acquaintances, nor walking on Sunday mornings to the little meeting-house (192).

The limitations of Barton’s fame implicit in the possessive pronoun ‘their’ is celebrated rather than lamented by the biographer. It is not the poetry that is stressed, but his presence, and his role as a focal point of town life, symbolizing welcome and unity (‘greetings’, ‘meeting-house’). During his life-time, the townfolk celebrated ‘their poet’ by naming a schooner after him. The biographer quotes a letter by Barton, in which he notes good-humouredly that

the parties were not literary people, or great readers or lovers of verse; I am not sure that they ever read a page of mine. But I suppose that they thought a poet creditable, some how or other, to a port (39).

The figure of the poet has retained some of its mystique, but this is divorced from the poetry itself. Frequently written by friends or acquaintances, these are works that enable small communities to write about one another. Individuals mentioned within the works frequently appear in the list of subscribers. The poet is so far from being a figure of Romantic alienation

³⁵⁹ Ray, *The Aged Pilgrim and His Songs*, p. 4.

and retreat that he acts as figure around which communities coalesce and local bonds are strengthened.

This emphasis on the local appears as another response to contemporary developments in literary biography. Whilst debates surrounding the distasteful and disreputable intrusions of literary biography persevered, scholarly literary biographies were being increasingly developed. In 1878, Macmillan began to publish their acclaimed 'English Men of Letters' series, edited by John Morley. The series was aimed at serving those 'whose leisure is scanty' yet who desired more information about 'the masters of our literature'.³⁶⁰ Samuel Johnson was the first subject. (Keats had been sufficiently rehabilitated by then also to make the selection; neither Blake nor Clare was so fortunate.) Other projects included the 'English Poets' series, begun in 1880 by T. Humphry Ward, and the 'Great Writers' series. With the inception of Leslie Stephen's *DNB* in 1882, efforts to construct a national heritage – literary but also, with Stephen's monumental effort, far broader – were endemic.

The existence of such works threw into relief the contradictory stance of biographers of obscure and neglected writers. Biographers of the 'inglorious' had always drawn attention to the unusual nature of their subjects, and frequently offered their works as an alternative to the contemporary celebration of famous men. The publication of these biographies that gave such sustained attention to the formation of a canon, however, created a larger category of subjects who could be defined as excluded from the idea of greatness. The line between fame and obscurity became sharper, though authors, as always, drifted in and out of fashion. Strikingly, however, biographies such as Lucas's appear less concerned with the tension between fame and obscurity - though that is clearly important in their works too - than with the tension between the national and the local. Though these works, as John Kijinski argues, aimed 'to establish for a wide readership a notion of a shared, organic English culture, one

³⁶⁰ John Morley, quoted in Gillian Fenwick, 'Nourishing the Curiosity: Leslie Stephen and the English Men of Letters series', *NCP*, 22 (1995), p. 95

that united all citizens of the nation regardless of class or region',³⁶¹ they tended to ignore the complexity of the nation as a category and put forward a centrist vision. As the national was given ever greater publicity through such works, the 'local' became a new category that had to be defended.

The Victorian period experienced a dramatic increase in the publication of literary biographies. Alongside lives of Dickens, Eliot or Tennyson were also published lives of far less celebrated writers. The category of biographies of inglorious writers is varied and includes several strands. A number of biographies of minor writers were published simply because of the subject's personal connection to a more famous individual, which could provide the occasion for the publication of letters and anecdotes (there is an element of this in the biography of Bernard Barton, whose close friendship with Charles Lamb Lucas describes). Such works display little interest in choosing an inglorious subject, beyond the usual remark that they throw new light on more famous individuals. Several works were concerned with narrating the life of an author whose works were well known even though the personal life of the author was not – such is the case, for example, with the 1862 biography of Thomas Day, the popular author of *Sandford and Merton*. Such works build on pre-existing rumours and myths, and insist that the author's life throws interesting light on the works. There are also, of course, the usual pious domestic biographies paying tribute to loved ones, by authors who often overestimate their father's or son's artistic talents, or avoid the subject entirely. Others attempt to keep a subject in the public eye who they find at risk of drifting into obscurity: the author of *Vathek*, William Beckford, is the subject of such a work.³⁶²

³⁶¹ James G. Kijinski, 'John Morley's "English Men of Letters" Series and the Politics of Reading', *VS*, 34 (1991), p. 207.

³⁶² See D.C. nos. 67; 75; 119; 182.

The most interesting biographies are those, however, that make the obscurity of their subjects a central theme of the work. Biographers of poets made it clear in various ways that the public had a new role of responsibility in maintaining the national heritage, and, crucially, pleaded in terms of emotion rather than criticism of literary discernment. The genre of biography itself could go some way towards healing the rift between poets and their public, whether by making a claim for fame, as with Milnes and Gilchrist, using biography as a genre that could compensate for public tensions, as with Carlyle, or by promoting a kind of levelling between the poet and the public by using biography as a cosy form of social intercourse. In all these cases, the biographer envisages himself as a necessary mediator between public and subject. In the opening of *The Life of Blake*, Gilchrist complained of the exclusion of his subject from biographical dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The launch of the *Dictionary of National Biography* would take the debate surrounding the inclusion and exclusion of biographical subjects to a new level.

Chapter Five

'Forgotten Benefactors': The *Dictionary of National Biography*

The two divergent strands of biographical writing in the nineteenth century – one that worshipped the famous sons of the nation, and the other that paid homage to its hidden subjects – were brought together in the largest biographical enterprise of the Victorian age: the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

A number of parallel cultural projects in the late nineteenth century gave a renewed prominence to the debate surrounding appropriate biographical subjects. One of these was the National Portrait Gallery. Calls for a portrait gallery somehow representative of British history had grown increasingly insistent throughout the 1850s, repeatedly stimulated by Thomas Carlyle, who promoted both the Scottish and English galleries. In 1854 he explained his conception of the Edinburgh exhibition. It would include, he hoped, 'whoever *lives* in the memory of Scotchmen, whoever is yet practically recognizable as a conspicuous worker, speaker, singer, or sufferer in the past time of Scotland [...] who said, did or suffered anything truly memorable, or anything still much remembered.'³⁶³ The proposal raises as many questions as it solves: how does one define the 'practically recognizable', or apply selection criteria to the phrase 'anything still much remembered'? The founders of the English project also struggled to set out their policy of inclusion, though it was generally agreed that

³⁶³ Thomas Carlyle, 'Project of a National Exhibition of Scottish Portraits' (1854), in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1857-8), vol. V, p. 319.

subjects would be chosen ‘without any bias to any political or religious party’.³⁶⁴ The definition was flexible enough to enable one MP to complain that ‘on looking over the list of portraits already acquired, there are some whose claims to be there I cannot understand.’³⁶⁵ The gallery began to take shape in 1857 in Westminster, but did not find its permanent home in St. Martin’s Place until 1895. The first portrait to be acquired was that of the suitably eminent William Shakespeare.

Whilst the expanding portrait collection was seeking a more fitting and permanent home, George Frederick Watts, in 1887, wrote to *The Times* proposing a different kind of biographical commemoration as ‘another Jubilee suggestion’. Watts insisted that ‘it would surely be of national interest to collect a complete record of the stories of heroism in every-day life’. Once again, his proposition was beset with difficulties. ‘Every-day heroism’ is an almost paradoxical term; the phrase ‘complete record’ presents insurmountable difficulties. The monument would be a tribute to ‘forgotten heroes’. The brief letter concludes with Watt’s insistence that ‘the material prosperity of a nation is not an abiding possession; the deeds of its people are’.³⁶⁶ His appeal was ignored, and Watts resolved to create the memorial himself. He gathered funds, collected tales of heroism from newspapers, and oversaw the erection of the monument in 1899. The result is a gallery of fifty-three tablets within Postman’s Park in London,³⁶⁷ at the centre of which stands a small statue in honour of Watts himself. Each tablet records in approximately two dozen words the life of its subject, such as ‘Thomas Griffin, fitter’s labourer, April 12 1899, [who] in a boiler explosion at a Battersea sugar refinery was fatally scalded in returning to search for his mate.’ The tablets, apart from their sparse decorations with flames or waves evocative of the tragedies, read like tombstone engravings,

³⁶⁴ Quoted in Charles Saumarez Smith, ‘Introduction’, *The National Portrait Gallery: An Illustrated Guide* (London, 1997), p. 12.

³⁶⁵ [Unsigned], *Hansard* (July 13, 1858), p. 1422.

³⁶⁶ G. F. Watts, ‘Another Jubilee Suggestion’, *The Times*, 32169 (September 5, 1887), p. 14.

³⁶⁷ Postman’s Park is situated north of St Paul’s Cathedral, off King Edward Street.

or the summary headings of entries in a biographical dictionary. Watts's gallery was unavoidably arbitrary and extremely selective in its display of 'everyday' working-class subjects.

The National Portrait Gallery and Watts's Postman's Park tablets are but two of the numerous commemorative enterprises that were undertaken in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and amongst which the *Dictionary of National Biography* emerged.³⁶⁸ The *DNB* shared their difficulties concerning the selection of appropriate subjects, but took a new angle in attempting to combine both criteria of inclusion: eminence and humble worth. Indeed, the *DNB* is crucially important amongst works of nineteenth-century biography in seeking to unite the two apparently distinct currents of contemporary life-writing. Just as Thomas Carlyle's works present a vision of history and biography in which both the Great and the obscure are (often contradictorily) pre-eminent, so does the *DNB* offer two national spectrums. Leslie Stephen was principally responsible for providing substantial space for lesser-known subjects within the dictionary. In doing so, he united the diverse roles attributed to the 'obscure' throughout nineteenth-century biography. The 'obscure', in the *DNB*, challenge traditional perspectives, possess imaginative potential, and stimulate emotions within the reader. More than any other biographer, Stephen makes it clear that the 'obscure' men and women were not to be recovered, celebrated and remembered in a systematic project of social revaluation. Instead, they were to be encountered randomly, and that a brief contact with, and emotional recognition of, the contribution of hidden lives could in turn sustain the moral vigour of the nation.

³⁶⁸ A longer survey might also include Madame Tussaud's waxwork museums, dedicated to celebrities both dead and alive, the Westminster mural scheme that gathered portraits and paintings of events from British history to fill the walls of the new Parliament buildings, or the Albert Memorial in Kensington.

A monumental enterprise

When the *Dictionary of National Biography* was launched by Smith, Elder, in 1882, it was done with the lessons learnt from previous attempts at such works in mind. Though many biographical dictionaries had previously been attempted and published, the one most akin to the *DNB* was the *Biographia Britannica* (1747-66) that aimed, in eight folio volumes, to include ‘the lives of the most eminent persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland’.³⁶⁹ A new edition was begun in 1777, but collapsed under the letter ‘F’ sixteen years later. This had remained the principal biographical dictionary until Smith’s enterprise, and had become insufficient for contemporary scholarly needs, notably by having omitted ‘hundreds of names that we want to see’.³⁷⁰ When George Smith considered publishing a new dictionary he knew that it would never be a commercial success. Instead, these past failures ‘challenged [his] pride,’ and he offered the project as his ‘gift to English letters.’³⁷¹

Smith approached Leslie Stephen with his initial idea for a work of universal biography. Leslie Stephen, following J. A. Symonds’s advice, persuaded him to downscale the project to a work of national biography.³⁷² A list of possible ‘A’s was drawn up to gain a sense of the size of the work (estimated at fifty volumes), and a specimen life, Stephen’s ‘Addison’, was composed. The process of recruiting contributors began, and Stephen was ready to make a public announcement in December 1882, through the *Athenaeum*. In this periodical, he advertised the preparation of a new ‘Biographia Britannica’. He describes it as a work ‘intended to include English, Scotch, and Irish names from the earliest period. This includes Americans who were also British subjects. It will not include any names of living

³⁶⁹ *Biographia Britannica, or, The Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the earliest ages, down to the present times* (London, 1747).

³⁷⁰ R. C. Christie [review of *DNB* vols. I-X], *QR*, 164 (Jan-April 1887), p. 354.

³⁷¹ George Smith, from a conversation transcribed in 1899, quoted in Leonard Huxley, *The House of Smith Elder* (London: printed for private circulation, 1923), pp. 181-2.

³⁷² See Leslie Stephen to J. A. Symonds, 13 October 1882, quoted in Frederick Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), p. 351.

persons.’ He added that ‘we should aim at giving the greatest possible amount of information in a thoroughly business-like form. [...] We must, in the first place, exclude (with certain exceptions) names which are only names.’³⁷³ Stephen’s vague language already intimated the problems of selection and organisation that lay ahead. He appealed to the *Athenaeum* readers for help in the enterprise, for suggestions of possible biographical subjects and prospective contributors. The project was officially launched.

A rapid overview of the *DNB* conveys the size and difficulties of the enterprise. A temporary staff was assembled in 1882 and offices found on the top floor of 14 Waterloo Place, next to the offices of Smith, Elder & Co. After some consideration, Sidney Lee was appointed as sub-editor in March 1883. The first volume appeared on 1st January 1885, and a publication rate of four volumes a year was determined upon and maintained until the completion of the project in June 1900. The Dictionary eventually totalled sixty-three volumes, with three supplementary volumes in 1901, which included those lives unintentionally omitted and recent deaths.

The bare dates conceal the effort and workload involved. Whilst Stephen struggled to maintain regular office hours, Lee imposed a rigorous schedule of three hours each morning at the British museum and four in the Waterloo offices for assistant editors, with a half-day’s work on Saturdays. The editors, who dealt with angry widows, unscrupulous researchers, and circumlocutory writers, managed no fewer than 647 contributors; the total number of lives amounted to 27,236.³⁷⁴ Stephen’s letters are replete with grumbles concerning ‘le Damned dictionary’.³⁷⁵ In 1891, Julia Stephen wrote to George Smith on his behalf that ‘it has become perfectly plain to him that he must henceforward give up any attempt to edit the

³⁷³ Leslie Stephen, ‘A New “Biographia Britannica”’, *Athenaeum*, 2878 (December 23, 1882), p. 850.

³⁷⁴ Gillian Fenwick’s studies on the *DNB* provide invaluable statistics for the work.

³⁷⁵ LS to Gabriel Loppé, 1 December 1887, transcribed in John Bicknell, *Selected Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1996), vol. 2, p. 353.

Dictionary'.³⁷⁶ Though his input in the dictionary remained immense, Lee's name appeared as joint editor in March 1890 (volume 22), and Stephen's name was dropped altogether in June 1891 (volume 27). Lee saw the work through to its completion and oversaw three supplementary volumes (1901), an index and epitome, known as the concise dictionary (1903), and a volume of errata (1904); he also contributed to the corrected reprint of the work in twenty-two volumes, published in 1908-9. The *DNB* engulfed the latter half of Stephen's life; it dominated Lee's. 'The *DNB*', Pollard declares, 'could hardly have been produced in an age less strenuous than the Victorian'.³⁷⁷

Twentieth-century writers and critics have tended to admire the sheer size of the *DNB* project, and agree with Pollard's vision of it as a symbol of late-Victorian entrepreneurship, or what Lord Rosebery termed 'the greatest literary monument of the Victorian age'.³⁷⁸ Alan Bell describes it as a 'Temple of British Worthies'; for Giles Foden, it is 'one of the great institutions of British life'.³⁷⁹ It is worth noting that such reverence was not unanimous. A ninety-two page spoof of the work, *Lives of the 'Lustrious, a Dictionary of Irrational Biography*, signed 'Sidney Stephen & Leslie Lee', appeared in 1901. The introduction sets out the editors' intention to provide a 'monumental work' and provides mock entries on living celebrities, such as Henry James, who is described as a 'Six-Shilling Sensationalist' whose 'works are famous for their blunt, almost brutal directness of style, and naked realism'.³⁸⁰

The 'monumental' label is a double-edged one. It suggests respect whilst laying emphasis on precisely those qualities of Victorian biography that the 'new biographers' of the

³⁷⁶ Julia Stephen to George Smith, 7 April 1891. Smith, Elder Papers. NLS. MSS. 23175-6.

³⁷⁷ A. F. Pollard, 'Sir Sidney Lee and the 'Dictionary of National Biography'', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 4 (1926-27), p. 6.

³⁷⁸ Quoted in Alan Bell, 'Leslie Stephen and the DNB', *TLS* (December 16, 1977), p. 1478.

³⁷⁹ Alan Bell, 'A portable Valhalla', *TLS* (October 2, 1981), p. 1115; Giles Foden, 'Launched to eternity', *Guardian* (September 25, 2004). <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1311259,00.html>

³⁸⁰ 'Sidney Stephen & Leslie Lee', *Lives of the 'Lustrious* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co. 1901), p. 47. Julie Codell identifies the authors as Sidney Lee and Leslie Stephen themselves in *The Victorian Artist*, p. 266. She does not provide evidence of this authorship, however, and Fenwick's extensive bibliographical study of Stephen makes no mention of the work.

early twentieth century would so persistently attack. Leslie Stephen's posthumous reputation has been dominated by Virginia Woolf's too memorable representations of him in her autobiographical writings and as Mr. Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse* (1927). Hermione Lee writes that 'her concept of traditional life-writing was derived from her father's major life's work, the *Dictionary of National Biography*.' This was a mode of writing based on 'great men', a concept which she never ceased to question.³⁸¹ Sidney Lee was another target. He appears in Woolf's essay 'The New Biography' as the epitome of unsatisfactory Victorian life-writing,³⁸² and is given another dig in *A Room of One's Own*, where she mentions that 'I told you [...] that Shakespeare had a sister, but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee's life of the poet.'³⁸³

It is such judgments that have created a reputation for the DNB as an outmoded 'phallogocentric monument'.³⁸⁴ It is undoubtedly true that it under-represented several categories of subjects –most obviously women (3.5% of the lives included) and the working class. Sidney Lee tried to address this problem in his 1896 essay 'National Biography', in which he attributed this neglect to historical conditioning rather than contemporary misogyny: 'woman's opportunities of distinction were infinitesimal in the past, and are very small compared with men's – something like one to thirty – at the present moment.'³⁸⁵

Yet, as many critics have countered, the *DNB* editors practised an unusually flexible approach. The recent publication of the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) has provided a useful reminder that the 'use of the *DNB* as a sort of establishment roll-call of national pre-eminence is recent'. The *ODNB* editor, Colin Matthew, praised the 'integrationalist approach of the original edition, in which many minor figures were

³⁸¹ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London, 1997), p. 7.

³⁸² Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume IV* (London, 1994), p. 573.

³⁸³ Woolf, 'The New Biography', pp. 473-8; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, 1931), p. 171.

³⁸⁴ Quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 68.

³⁸⁵ Sidney Lee, 'National Biography: A Lecture', private issue from the March issue of the *Cornhill Magazine* (1896), p. 28.

included',³⁸⁶ together with 'deviants, rebel and dissenters'.³⁸⁷ Though it has now become commonplace to celebrate the work as a catalogue of eccentrics and misfits, the developments surrounding the biographical genre that led to such an editorial stance has received far less attention.

Two editorial approaches: Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee

Accounts of the *DNB* have rarely laid sufficient stress upon the divergences of its two editors. Yet, if the dictionary embraces two, often contradictory, visions, it is in great part due to the two distinct contributions of Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. When George Smith proposed the plan of the dictionary to Leslie Stephen, Stephen had already been working as editor of Smith's *Cornhill Magazine* since 1871. Stephen had established a solid reputation as a man of letters – Noël Annan goes so far as to claim that, after Thomas Arnold, he 'was the second most important man of letters in the late Victorian age'.³⁸⁸ Leslie Stephen was born into the Clapham Sect, a social elite descended from important Evangelical and Quaker families who held key positions in the legal, literary and teaching professions. An agnostic, his works are deeply concerned with ideas of truth, morality and common sense. Stephen was notoriously self-deprecating, and his first letters to George Smith on the subject of the *DNB* are full of self-doubt. Having witnessed the decreasing sales of the *Cornhill* under his editorship, he wrote: 'I am rather depressed about my work. I have done my best, but it does not seem as if I made much impression upon any one [...] it gives me qualms in regard to the biography'. Nevertheless, he had a love of biography, believed in its artistic potential, and thought 'that there is a good piece of work to be done if I can do it'.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ See 'Introduction', *ODNB*, <http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/prelims/>

³⁸⁷ Colin Matthew, 'The New DNB', *History Today*, 43 (September 1993), p. 11.

³⁸⁸ Noël Annan, 'Editor's Introduction', *Leslie Stephen: Selected Writings in British Intellectual History* (London, 1979), p. xi.

³⁸⁹ LS to George Smith, 31 October 1882. Smith, Elder, Papers. *NLS*, MSS. 23175-6.

Leslie Stephen drew many of his ideas on biography from the long tradition of life-writing that privileges the brief portrait and the telling anecdote, to which he added a late nineteenth-century respect for scholarship and precision. He has a natural affinity with the writings of Aubrey, and with the ‘excellent’ Izaak Walton (‘charming little idylls, beautiful to read, but curiously empty of facts’). His assessment of Antony à Wood, whom he describes as ‘one of the most thorough and satisfactory of antiquaries’, whose ‘inestimable collection is charming not only from its good workmanship within its own limits, but also from the delightful growls of disgust’ at subjects who did not share his High-Church views might, with some modifications, do well as a description of Stephen’s own dictionary entries. ‘Of the immortal Boswell’, Stephen adds, ‘it is happily needless to speak.’³⁹⁰

Stephen compares the pleasure of reading the *DNB* with that of reading the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. Though Stephen was expected, to his disgruntlement, to submit to strict scholarly standards with the biographical dictionary, his own delight lies in the unpredictable and the random elements of biography. He delightfully claims that

no man is a real reader until he is sensible of the pleasure of turning over some miscellaneous collection, and lying like a trout in a stream snapping up, with the added charm of unsuspectedness, any of the queer little morsels of oddity or pathos that may drift past him.³⁹¹

The passage shows Stephen anticipating many of the later developments in biography that his daughter Virginia Woolf so powerfully embodied, and recalls in particular the opening paragraphs of *A Room of One’s Own* in which Woolf, sitting on a riverbank, ponders on her subject and has a thought ‘let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither [...] until – you know the little tug – the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one’s line’.³⁹² ‘Charm’ is a recurrent word in Stephen’s writings. So is a focus on the small, the part, and the fragment. The reader should, like Stephen himself, ‘dip’ into the

³⁹⁰ Leslie Stephen, ‘Biography’, *NR*, 22 (September 1893 – February 1894), pp. 176–7.

³⁹¹ Leslie Stephen, ‘National Biography’, *NR*, 27 (March–August 1896), p. 63.

³⁹² Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, pp. 8–9.

entries and ‘ramble through’ the volumes. As David Amigoni notes, the *DNB* was a contribution to the ‘residual desultory and dilettante modes’ of late Victorian intellectual life,³⁹³ and this was largely the result of Stephen’s interventions.

It was Leslie Stephen who was principally responsible for reconfiguring the *DNB* as a homage to mediocre, second-rate and neglected lives. (The label he gives them constantly changes). The two essays ‘Biography’ (1893-4) and ‘National Biography’ (1896) provide important insights into his concept of the *DNB*. In these, he argues that ‘the real test of the value of the book is in the adequacy of these timid and third-rate lives’, the ‘less conspicuous people, about whom it is hard to get information elsewhere’.³⁹⁴ In Johnsonian terms, he concludes that ‘every life [...] has its interest’.³⁹⁵ He upheld the argument in the later essay, in which he insists that ‘it is the second-rate people; the people whose lives have to be reconstructed from obituary notices, or from references in memoirs and collections of letters; [...] or sometimes painfully dug out of collections of manuscripts, and who really become generally accessible through the dictionary alone’.³⁹⁶ For Stephen, there is ‘an immense number of second-rate people whose lives are full of suggestion to any intelligent reader’.³⁹⁷ He continues: ‘No one can ramble through this long gallery without storing up a number of vivid images of the lesser luminaries,’ who are ‘full of suggestions to the moderately thoughtful’. Such lives have value in scholarly terms, but also for their imaginative potential. Their role, beyond a primary utilitarian function, is to broaden a vision of humanity.³⁹⁸ Stephen’s 1896 essay ‘Forgotten Benefactors’ is a lengthy tribute to the ‘thousands who have

³⁹³ David Amigoni, ‘Distinctively queer little morsels: imagining distinction, groups, and difference in the *DNB* and the *ODNB*’, *JVC*, 10 (Winter 2005), p. 280.

³⁹⁴ Stephen, ‘Biography’, p. 172.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

³⁹⁶ Stephen, ‘National Biography’, p. 59.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

long sunk into oblivion'.³⁹⁹ Such lives form the constant focus of Stephen's commentaries on the *DNB* project.

Sidney Lee, who came from a very different background, has attracted far less biographical and critical attention. Unlike Stephen, born into one of the chief intellectual families of Victorian England, Lee was the son of a London merchant. Born Solomon Lazarus Lee in 1859, he was of Jewish descent although he did not later practise the faith, and later changed his name. At Oxford, where he earned a reputation as an exceptional scholar, he specialized in Shakespeare and Elizabethan History. It was the historian F. J. Furnivall who recommended Lee to Stephen as a possible sub-editor. In his letter of self-presentation to Stephen, Sidney Lee, aged twenty-three, explained that he had 'studied English history & Literature for many years & I have always endeavoured as far as possible to make my historical work as thorough as possible by going to original authorities & endeavouring to get at the truths through them.'⁴⁰⁰ Already, Lee was making claims to the kind of rigorous academic study and use of primary sources that were only beginning to take hold in British universities.

Contributors to the *DNB* noted how well suited the editor and sub-editor were. Lee possessed the indispensable scholarly rigour and the patience to scour and correct proofs which Stephen lacked. Beyond editorial practices, however, they were also distinct in their conceptions of biography. Though it is possible to overstate the disparity, it is interesting that whereas Leslie Stephen, anchored within the dominant intellectual group of the period, appealed for the dictionary as a work embracing the obscure, the second-rate and the

³⁹⁹ Leslie Stephen, 'Forgotten Benefactors', in *Social Rights and Duties: Addresses to Ethical Societies* (London, 1896), vol. II, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁰ SL to LS, 15 November 1882. Leslie Stephen: Letters related to DNB. *Bodleian Library*. MS. Don e 121.

eccentric, Sidney Lee, of Jewish descent and belonging to no immediate network of power or influence, would champion the Great Lives of British history.

In his editorial work and essays, Sidney Lee positioned himself within a biographical tradition in strong contrast to Leslie Stephen's. Lee draws inspiration from a classical tradition and embraces Plutarch, Tacitus, Aristotle and North's sixteenth-century translation of Plutarch. In his own essays and lectures on biography, *National Biography* (1896), *Principles of Biography* (1911) and *The Perspective of Biography* (1918), Lee reiterated, in language strikingly similar to former exponents of this Great Tradition of biography, that the power of biography lay in its ability to endure. In 1662, Fuller, author of the *History of the English Worthies* wrote that:

For monuments made of wood are subject to be burnt; of glass, to be broken; [...] so that in my apprehension, the safest way to secure memory from oblivion is (next to his own virtues) by committing the same to writing to posterity.⁴⁰¹

Here is Sidney Lee:

Pyramids and mausoleums, statues and columns, however fitting it may be encourage them in the interests of art, all fail to satisfy one or other of conditions of permanence, publicity, and perspicuity. [...] It is to the prosaic, yet more accessible and more adaptable, machinery of biography that a nation must turn if her distinguished sons and daughters are to be accorded rational and efficient monuments.⁴⁰²

To the concern with immortality is brought a strong dose of practicality - the 'accessible', the 'efficient' - which gives the *DNB* project a more contemporary veneer. The implicit affinity between biography and other commemorative constructions that Lee proudly brandishes was precisely what many contemporary critics objected to as a major weakness in the genre. Comments lamenting the 'mausoleum' quality of Victorian life-writing abounded at this time,⁴⁰³ yet for Lee it is an aspect of biography to be celebrated.

⁴⁰¹ Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (New York, 1965), vol. I, p. 2.

⁴⁰² Lee, 'National Biography', p. 15. See Ian Donaldson, 'National Biography and the Arts of Memory: From Thomas Fuller to Colin Matthew', in *Mapping Lives*, pp. 67-82.

⁴⁰³ Not least Virginia Woolf's own comments on her father's autobiographical writings that became known as the *Mausoleum Book*.

The main focus of Stephen's essays on the *DNB* is second-rate lives. Lee's dominant preoccupation is with the 'commemorative instinct' provided by biographical dictionaries.

For Lee:

Biography exists to satisfy a natural instinct in man – the commemorative instinct – the universal desire to keep alive the memories of those who by character and exploits have distinguished themselves from the mass of mankind.⁴⁰⁴

Lee describes biography in terms that admirers of contemporary theories of hero-worship would have recognised: the subject's achievements should 'be capable of moving the interest of posterity' and recorded in a manner able 'to outlive the fashion or taste of the hour'.⁴⁰⁵

Lee's examples include Shakespeare and Wellington. Actions that are 'practically indistinguishable from those of thousands of his fellows'⁴⁰⁶ can claim no place in the work.

The idea of the 'serious' and of 'magnitude' appears in striking contrast to Stephen's emphasis on 'charm' and 'queer little morsels'.

It is easy to characterise Lee's biographical views as uniform. The fact that Lee was still writing in this manner, publishing an old-fashioned biography of King Edward VII in 1925-7, when Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey had already hastened a revolution in biography, underscore his apparently old-fashioned propositions, and make Stephen's views seem even more modernist by comparison. In fact, Lee did pay attention to the question of changing reputations. In the 1918 essay 'The Perspective of Biography', the confident tones of 'The Principles of Biography' (1911) give way to a less rigid approach. He notes that 'human action which can be credited with the biographic quality of distinction, varies infinitely in scale' and that 'it is not indeed only the master-spirits, - the Shakespeares and the Miltons, the Drakes and the Nelsons' who ought to be included. Biography can bring 'a

⁴⁰⁴ Sidney Lee, *Principles of Biography: The Leslie Stephen Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-8.

⁴⁰⁶ Lee, 'National Biography', p. 25.

goodly sized minority within the biographic fold'.⁴⁰⁷ Nevertheless, this statement holds none of the joyful tone of Stephen's pronouncement, and forms a very small proportion of Lee's biographical dictums.

Leslie Stephen, however, did not break entirely with Victorian biographical conventions. Despite his critique of panegyric life-writing, Stephen expressed a typically Victorian wariness of biographical intrusions into private life. When the furor surrounding J. A. Froude's 'warts and all' biography of Carlyle exploded, he condemned Froude.⁴⁰⁸ Stephen's reservations on biography concerned reticence, rather than the stature of the subject. Lee's views often appear more old-fashioned, yet is worth recalling that he possessed a more modern view of scholarship than Stephen, and he brought to the enterprise the crucial scholarly apparatus that it so clearly needed, and which permitted the *DNB* to survive well into the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the differences between the two editors are significant, and help to account for the different ways in which the work was both conceived and received. Lee and Stephen used their essays as a form of discussion on editorial policy. Stephen's 1896 essay 'National Biography' is in many ways a direct response to Lee's lecture of the same title, given the same year. Throughout the essay, Stephen repeatedly, though courteously, distances himself from Lee's vision. He begins by applauding Lee's lecture. His sentences imply agreement, whilst continuously hinting at dissent, such as the idea, almost nonsensical in its redundancy, that 'if I were to deal with his subject from the same point of view, I should have little more to do than say "ditto" to most of his remarks'. He adds, gently, that Lee 'left untouched certain considerations which are a necessary complement to his argument'.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Sidney Lee, *The Perspective of Biography* (English Association, 1918), p. 8.

⁴⁰⁸ LS to Charles Eliot Norton, 24 November 1885, quoted in Maitland, *Life and Letters*, p. 387.

⁴⁰⁹ Stephen, 'National Biography', p. 51.

Again, he asks ‘what entitles a man to a place in the dictionary? [...] Mr. Lee has given an answer which is, I think, correct in its proper place; but [...] I must point out that there is another.’⁴¹⁰ He concludes by suggesting that, though his own vision means that ‘the commemorative instinct may not be fully gratified’,⁴¹¹ the reader may yet benefit from the work in imaginative and human terms. Such a public display of disagreement between the two editors is somewhat startling.

Differences in the imagery used by both editors reveal further divergences. Stephen constantly fears that over-scholarly ‘dryness’ would squeeze out the life of the project. Lee states that biography is akin to ‘chemistry’, and that the biographer works with a ‘magnifying-glass’.⁴¹² Stephen counters that ‘to be reduced to a specimen and put in a museum, is not a very cheering prospect’.⁴¹³ Where Stephen insists on the impossibility of relaying the complete life and favours depending instead on suggestive fragments, Lee has faith in biography’s ability to present the life as a completed whole: biography offers the ‘completeness which death alone assures.’⁴¹⁴ The funereal dominates Lee’s language. Leslie Stephen’s language expresses a belief that biography should bring the dead to life. The biographical sketch should show ‘the man in his ordinary dress’⁴¹⁵ and produce the Carlylean feeling ‘that a real voice is speaking [...] and a little island of light, with moving and feeling figures, still standing out amidst the gathering shades of oblivion’.⁴¹⁶ The biographer should put the subject ‘at one end of a literary telephone and the reader at the other’,⁴¹⁷ and must

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p. 57.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p. 65.

⁴¹² Lee, ‘National Biography’, p. 16.

⁴¹³ Stephen, ‘National Biography’, p. 59.

⁴¹⁴ Lee, ‘Principles’, p. 37.

⁴¹⁵ Stephen, ‘Biography’, p. 177.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, p. 180.

create 'a speaking likeness'.⁴¹⁸ For Leslie Stephen, biography was about resuscitating the dead. For Lee, it was about giving them a decent funeral.

The *DNB* provides at first glance a unified whole. A closer look reveals that, despite mutual sympathy and a similar scholarly aim, though they were not so opposed as to make the *Dictionary of National Biography* divided in style and content, the two editors modified each other's views in their essays, and brought attention to the different forces and ideas at work in the dictionary that reflect nineteenth-century biography as a whole. [Figs. 14-15]



Figs. 14-15: Mr. Sidney Lee pausing for lunch, and leaning on the volumes of the *DNB*, in *Punch* (January 21, 1903), p. 49.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 181. Doyle, 'O'Reilly, Deane, DNB', vol. 11, p. 111.

Debating inclusion

Many critics agreed with the *Athenaeum* reviewer who stated that it was in the extensive inclusion of obscure lives that ‘the superiority of the work over both the Belgian and the German dictionaries of national biography is marked’.⁴¹⁹ Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee made the much-criticized decision to publish the *Dictionary of National Biography* without a preface (though their essays went some way towards making up for this). This enabled them to avoid defining their inclusion policy in precise terms. However at odds their interpretation of ‘comprehensive’, the editors agreed to make their selection of subjects as unbiased and as wide as possible. Lee published a ‘Statistical Account’ of the *DNB* in 1900, in which he claimed that ‘it is believed that the names include all men and women of British or Irish race who have achieved any reasonable measure of distinction in any walk of life’ and that ‘no sphere of activity has been consciously overlooked [...]. The principle upon which names have been admitted has been from all points of view generously interpreted’.⁴²⁰ Such a statement justifies Colin Matthew’s praise of the *DNB* as ‘integrationalist’.

Indeed, the dictionary acts as a counterpart to the image of Victorian biography as prudish and hero-worshipping by joyfully including criminals and courtesans as well as priests and poets. Above all, this approach meant that, as Lee states and as Stephen so frequently insisted in his essays, ‘great pains have been bestowed on the names of less widely acknowledged importance’.⁴²¹ Thus, one can read about Dennis O’Kelly (1720?-1787), a gamester who owned a racehorse, Eclipse, famous in its day, and a talking parrot who ‘whistled the 104th Psalm, ‘and was among parrots what Eclipse was among racehorses’⁴²² or ‘Margaret Catchpole, a real heroine of romance, who stole a horse and rode 70 miles to visit

⁴¹⁹ [Unsigned], ‘*DNB*, Vol. IV’, *Athenaeum*, 3025 (October 17, 1885), p. 501.

⁴²⁰ Sidney Lee, ‘A Statistical Account’, *DNB* (1921-22), p. lxvi.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² John Andrew Doyle, ‘O’Kelly, Dennis’, *DNB*, vol. XIV, pp. 970.

her lover'.⁴²³ Yet the inclusion of such individuals raises many questions. How did 'obscure' lives come to the attention of the dictionary-makers? What prompted the inclusion of one 'second-rate' life over another? What purpose did they serve? The initial strategy used to compile names for the *DNB* throws some light on the process.

A first step was the preservation of existing subjects. An early decision was to include 'all names that had hitherto been treated in independent works of biography, in general dictionaries, in collections of lives of prominent members of various classes of the community, and in obituary notices in the leading journals and periodicals.'⁴²⁴ A glance at previous biographical dictionaries reveals that an open-minded approach to subjects was not entirely new. Thomas Fuller's *A History of the Worthies of England* (1662) envisioned his work as one of moral improvement, and subjects were chosen according to their moral worth. Yet his selection procedure was surprisingly flexible. Fuller was happy to include, for example, 'all such *Mechanicks* who in any *Manual Trade* have reached a *clear Note* above others in their *Vocation*'. The compilers of the *Biographia Britannica* (1747) made less room for such achievements, but kept the idea of 'such of our countrymen as have been eminent, and by their performances of any kind deserve to be remembered' wide. Again, the intention was to 'prompt men to an imitation of their virtues'.⁴²⁵ Such subjects tended to be included for the combination of entertainment and moral instruction they could provide.

The motivations that prompted Stephen and Lee to include similar subjects were somewhat different. Inclusion of a subject was no longer dictated by piety, but instead by an unarticulated vision of the nation and the relationship between its public and private citizens. For Stephen, such lives possessed both imaginative and moral value. For both Lee and Stephen, they also extended the scholarly potential of the *DNB*. As many reviewers rapidly

⁴²³ Ibid, p. 64.

⁴²⁴ Lee, 'Statistical Account', p. lxiii.

⁴²⁵ *Biographia Britannica*, vol. I, p. viii.

noted, ‘we all know where to look for information about a Shakespeare, [...] but where shall we find details of those lives of men who have lived, perhaps, “far from the madding crowd” [...]?’⁴²⁶ (Frederick Boase expressed a similar justification in his *Modern English Biography* for the inclusion of ‘many hundred notices of the less known authors [...] merchants, country gentlemen and others’, and quotes Froude as a further inspiration.⁴²⁷)

A further step in the process of inclusion was to excavate new subjects. Stephen published alphabetical lists of all the names they intended to include in *The Athenaeum*. Readers were invited to comment on the lists and to suggest names they believed worthy of inclusion. Suggestions came flooding in, including the over-enthusiastic list of one specialist who, Stephen complained to Gosse, ‘offers me lives of 1,400 hymnwriters alone’.⁴²⁸ Others were more successful: Edward Ingress Bell wrote to Stephen suggesting that ‘ALAN DE WALSINGHAM the architect of the world renowned Lanter at Ely Cathedral should find a place in your list’; the architect was duly included, and Bell invited to write the life.⁴²⁹ Such transactions suggest the random element within the final lists of names: subjects who might have been forgotten found a place due to their lucky championing by a specialist or amateur enthusiast. Finding a ‘champion’ was important: names that found no prospective contributor were dropped. Thus, the thirteenth-century judge Roger de Baalun, the Elizabethan inventor Ralph Babbard and Robert Bacon, credited as the fifteenth-century discover of Iceland, all included in the *Athenaeum* list, were eventually removed. The final list of names was therefore not achieved through ‘precision’ but through the willingness of individuals to contribute to it.

This process of nomination, an open discussion between private citizens, sought to provide evidence of the democratic nature of the *DNB*. The aimed-for professionalism of the

⁴²⁶ H. S. Ashbee, ‘A New ‘Biographia Britannica’, *Athenaeum*, 2880 (January 6, 1883), p. 17.

⁴²⁷ Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography* (London, 1965), vol. I, prefatory material.

⁴²⁸ LS to Edmund Gosse, 13 December 1882, Gosse Papers, *BrL*, BC Gosse correspondence.

⁴²⁹ E. Ingress Bell to LS, 10 January 1883. Leslie Stephen, letters related to *DNB*. *Bodleian*, MS Don e 121.

inclusion process coexisted with a less rigorous form of discussion and gentlemen's agreements. As David Amigoni argues, the impartiality and openness Stephen (and, later, Lee) sought to display through such strategies was an 'ideological effect generated by the rhetoric of presentational strategies which concealed a dogmatism' that he describes as 'deterministic'.⁴³⁰ Certainly, the work was not free from bias. Anyone was free to suggest names for inclusion, but these were more likely to be those of interest to well-educated *Athenaeum* readers: had the lists been published in working-class journals, the results may have been very different.

Furthermore, the work took on the colour, more or less intentionally, of editors' personal tastes. Both Lee and Stephen had a strong sense of the importance of men of letters (supported by most reviewers - H. S. Ashbee hoped that 'every man and every woman who has written a book must be included').⁴³¹ Poets and writers regularly out-paged eminent scientists or national heroes. Other biases crept in. Stephen, one of the period's famous agnostics, limited the life of Keble to three and a half pages; Lee, less anti-clerical, gave Pusey eight, and admitted in the supplements the lives of St. Alban and St. Asaph which Stephen had refused on the grounds that the *DNB* was not a dictionary of hagiology.⁴³² The inclusion process therefore created a large space for subjects whose claims were perhaps not immediately obvious. Yet the appearance of so many obscure lives was determined perhaps less by rigorous selection procedures than a mixture of hazard, debate and personal preference, and the work is coloured by the preoccupations of the time in which it was produced.

⁴³⁰ David Amigoni, 'Life Histories and the Cultural Politics of Historical Knowing: the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the Late Nineteenth-Century Political Field', in *Life and Work History Analyses*, ed. Shirley Dex (London, 1991), p. 148.

⁴³¹ H. S. Ashbee, 'A New 'Biographia Britannica'', p. 17.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

‘Second-rate’ subjects could therefore be included for scholarly, ideological or personal reasons. Yet the dictionary could not become a repository of mediocre lives. The ability to find a balance between previously neglected subjects and a manageable, rational and scholarly result was one of Stephen’s constant preoccupations. The dictionary-maker’s role is, for him, involved in bringing ‘into some sort of order, alphabetical at least, the chaos of materials which is already so vast and so rapidly accumulating’.⁴³³ The idea of selection contained resonances with parallel contemporary debates. Characteristically, Stephen engaged with it in literary terms, whilst Lee took a more scientific approach.

By making claims for the value of the mediocre, Stephen pursued a debate that echoed his reflections on literary worth. The ever-growing publishing industry raised pressing questions on literary quality and the ability of works to attain immortality in a climate where mediocre and high literature rubbed shoulders. The critic Mark Pattison envisaged an ideal situation in which ‘in the literary creations of the ideal world, as in the living organisms of the material world, natural selection has saved us the difficulty of choice. [...] In the battle for existence the best survive, the weaker sink below the surface, and are heard of no more.’⁴³⁴ Men of letters such as Pattison took it upon themselves to guide readers through the literary jungle.

Leslie Stephen, one of such men of letters, wavered in his response to the debate. On the one hand, he upheld the value of strict literary standards, with the declaration that ‘really the value of second-rate literature is nil’. On the other hand, he engaged in a characteristic dismissal of elitism that opens the door to the celebration of mediocrity, with the insistence that ‘all books are good, that is to say there is scarcely any book that may not serve as a match to fire our enthusiasm’.⁴³⁵ The phrase closely echoes his similar justification, based on the

⁴³³ Ibid, p. 174.

⁴³⁴ Mark Pattison, ‘Books and Critics’, *FR*, 22 (1877), p. 669.

⁴³⁵ Quoted in Annan, *Leslie Stephen*, p. 186.

kindling of imagination and enthusiasm, of obscure biographical subjects. As editor of the *Cornhill*, he had catered to both tastes. Throughout his works he weighs the obvious merits of Greatness against the more personal pleasure to be experiencing from an acquaintance with the 'lesser'. Stephen frequently advocated being guided by one's own enthusiasm and taste, and he shrank from contemporary considerations of a quasi-scientific means of judging literature or – unlike Sidney Lee – biographical subjects.

Pattison's language had absorbed elements of circulating Darwinian and Malthusian ideas of the kind that found resonance with some dictionary readers and that was picked up by Sidney Lee himself. Lee's essays are replete with echoes of natural selection. In his 'Statistical Account', Lee estimated that 'one in every five thousand has gained a sufficient level of distinction to secure admission to this Dictionary', and calculated that 'every infant's chance of attaining the needful level of distinction has been one in ten thousand.'⁴³⁶ Lee was not the villain of the *DNB* – he believed that 'true biography is no handmaid of ethical instruction. [...] It does not exist to serve biological or anthropological science', but he added that they might well turn out to aid these sciences unintentionally.⁴³⁷ One of the consequences of the *DNB* and Lee's statistics was that, as he states in 'Principles of Biography', he was approached by biostatisticians and eugenicists such as Sir Francis Galton. Galton's attempts to discover whether mental traits could be inherited relied heavily on the analysis of biographical dictionaries. If critics were on the alert for Malthusian solutions for the proliferation of books, others looked to the *DNB* for enlightenment on the future of the British race. In both cases, it was apparent that championing obscurity was a more heavily loaded project than might at first appear.

⁴³⁶ Lee, 'Statistical Account', p. lxix.

⁴³⁷ Lee, 'Principles', pp. 39–40.

The reviewers' response to such an unprecedented display of second-rate subjects was ambivalent: they almost universally praised their inclusion, but frowned when their coverage was deemed disproportionate. Certainly, the presence of subjects whose claims were not immediately apparent was the source of wry comments. Edmund Gosse received the list of potential 'A' subjects, and wrote to Stephen: 'What an array of mediocrities begin with A!'⁴³⁸ Some reviewers expressed their praise in terms that matched Sidney Lee's. The *Edinburgh Review*, for example, was stimulated by the 'colossal' nature of the late-century biographical and encyclopaedic works, and compared them to 'giants' and 'pyramids'.⁴³⁹ Many showed sympathy with Leslie Stephen's aims. H. S. Ashbee responded to Stephen's announcement of the project in the *Athenaeum* by urging that 'to these obscurer individuals, of whom special biographies do not exist, or the particulars of whose lives are not easily accessible, special attention must be paid'.⁴⁴⁰ The publication of the fourth volume was greeted with the statement that the excellence of the work can be judged in its treatment of 'the smaller people', the 'unknown and often uninteresting persons'.⁴⁴¹ For the reviewer R. C. Christie, they also formed 'the most valuable part of a biographical dictionary'.⁴⁴²

Yet reviewers were alert to the paradoxes and dilemmas created by the category of 'obscure' subjects. The inclusion of certain obscure names on the ground that a sufficient amount was known about them would increase the element of randomness. The Dissenting minister John Angus was included, a man 'whose sole claim to distinction appears to be the publication of several funeral sermons', though countless, equally worthy, sermon and pamphlet-writers were not. Christie finds in the late seventeenth century a turning point after which began 'an enormous increase in the publication of pamphlets and other ephemeral

⁴³⁸ Edmund Gosse to LS, 10 January 1883. Gosse Papers, *Brotherton Library*. BC Gosse Correspondence.

⁴³⁹ [Unsigned], *ER* (April 1889), pp. 328-9.

⁴⁴⁰ Ashbee, 'A New 'Biographia Britannica,'' p. 17.

⁴⁴¹ [Unsigned review of *DNB*, volume IV], *Athenaeum*, 3025 (October 17, 1885), p. 501.

⁴⁴² [R. C. Christie], 'Biographical Dictionaries', *QR*, 157 (January 1884), p. 227.

literature',⁴⁴³ and rules of inclusion become more severe. Christie's article points to the fact that no real rules can be established. From a scholarly point of view, this could be problematic. From the point of view of gaining a sense of the national landscape, the panorama was fundamentally askew.

A further concern was that of proportionality. A reviewer of the second volume felt that 'here and there, of course, it is possible to find a name treated at greater length than its importance seems to demand.'⁴⁴⁴ Such concerns were related to the possible levelling qualities of a dictionary - anxieties that reached back to the eighteenth century, when the philosophical consequences of alphabetization were considered. In the *DNB*, Daniel Dancer, 'miser' (1716-1794), whose 'grandfather and father were both noted in their time as misers'⁴⁴⁵ though Daniel himself 'is distinguished from the majority of misers in that, notwithstanding his miserable love of gold, he possessed many praiseworthy qualities',⁴⁴⁶ jostles with the natural philosopher Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829). King Olaf, called the Black (1177?-1238) can be found close to Patrick O'Kelly, a little-known 'eccentric poet' (1754-1835?).⁴⁴⁷ Stephen and Lee were careful to avoid giving an impression of equal worth by carefully considering the proper number of pages to accord each subject. Since the *DNB*, unlike the new *ODNB*, avoided giving a summarizing paragraph evaluating the subject's evolving reputation, the length of an article was a pointed measure of worth. Where full-length biographies might raise problems of a disproportionate focus on a mediocre life, biographical entries may well have seemed the ideal medium to redress the balance.

If proportions were sometimes ignored by the editors of the *DNB*, reviewers took it upon themselves to redress the balance. Indeed, though they repeated in chorus that the

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ [Untitled review of *DNB* volume II], *Athenaeum*, 2999 (April 18, 1885), p. 497.

⁴⁴⁵ Alsager Vian, 'Dancer, Daniel (1716-1794)', vol. V, *DNB*, p. 462.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 463.

⁴⁴⁷ David James O'Donogue, 'O'Kelly, Patrick (1754-1835?)', *DNB*, vol. XIV, p. 971.

obscure lives were the most important aspect of the dictionary, they ignored them entirely in their articles on the *DNB*, and focused instead on the ‘great’ names. A review of the second volume considers at length ‘the most important article in the volume’: that on Francis Bacon. It is a review of the life of Burke, rather than the ‘criminal’ William Burke (1792-1829), which occupies much of the review of the seventh and eighth volumes. The movement between drawing attention to the obscure only to return them to oblivion is an important aspect of the work that echoes many full-length biographies of obscure lives. Stephen’s extended reflection on this dual movement, considered in greater detail below, is central to an understanding of the *DNB*’s obscure lives. It is important to note that Stephen himself, who reiterated the centrality of obscure lives in his essays, wrote some of the ‘greatest’ lives – Byron, Carlyle and Wordsworth amongst many – for the dictionary. Hierarchies are tested in the work, but not abolished.

The contributors

The manner in which the editors managed their many contributors reflects in interesting ways the inclusion and management of obscure lives. When Stephen initially sought to attract contributors, he threw the net wide and gathered a diverse group of writers and researchers, from noted critics and scholars to unknown amateurs. As the project progressed, however, this democratic group was moulded into a more restrained community. A parallel force within the dictionary that is less immediately apparent to twentieth-century readers but which struck contemporary reviewers was the movement through which Stephen brought hidden scholarly talent to light and recognition.

The *DNB* contributors, as the mediators between the readers and the biographical subjects, played a crucial role in reflecting the purposes and nature of the enterprise. Yet what

is immediately striking about this group of writers is that they were in the midst of the process of defining themselves. Though the *DNB* archives have been largely destroyed, a bulk of letters from prospective contributors remain. Stephen had sought out many contributors himself; others offered their services. The majority of the correspondents, upon presenting themselves, refer not to their academic qualifications but to their work published in journals or to an area of interest they have happened to follow up. Many loosely defined themselves as ‘men of letters’. Thus Thomas Bayne proposes to undertake a number of lives, and adds that ‘you may have seen my name in *Fraser*, appended to articles on Modern Poets – Rossetti, Swinburne, &c.’⁴⁴⁸ Charles Francis Keary draws attention to his publications in the *Saturday Review*, the *Nineteenth Century* and other contemporary journals.⁴⁴⁹ The qualification of Joseph Knight is that of ‘dramatic critic of the *Athenaeum*’.⁴⁵⁰ (They all found employment with the dictionary.) Even where contributors worked within a university, this is rarely mentioned. The writers do not identify themselves as academics but principally as writers for the press or independent researchers. These were men of letters who were used to having a more immediate relationship with the wider reading public, and with whom the public, since the gradual abandonment of anonymous articles, had become used to entertaining a relationship of familiarity. The austere, scholarly remoteness of a work of erudition such as a dictionary was thus softened.

Another category of contributors could claim expertise in an area such as the arts or the navy without clear scholarly credentials. Amateur enthusiasms played an important part in the *DNB*. Thompson Cooper, who wrote over 1,400 lives, worked as a solicitor whilst cultivating a private passion for biography and antiquarian research. Another large contributor was John Knox Laughton, author of 915 entries, who served as instructor in the Royal Navy

⁴⁴⁸ Thomas Bayne to LS, 25 December 1882. Leslie Stephen, letters related to *DNB*. *Bodleian*. MS Don e 121.

⁴⁴⁹ C. F. Keary to LS, 13 November 1882. *Ibid*.

⁴⁵⁰ Joseph Knight to LS, 8 January 1883. *Ibid*.

and was later invited to lecture on naval history at the new Royal Naval College. Lionel Henry Cust, author of 765 entries on artists, had studied at Cambridge before entering the civil service. He left this employment to pursue his real passion by joining the department of prints and drawings at the British Museum, and later became director of the National Portrait Gallery. George Clement Boase, author of over seven hundred articles, worked as a banker, a ship and insurance broker, a clerk, and managed a business of provision merchants. It was upon his retirement that he threw himself into biographical and antiquarian work.

Indeed, many of the important biographical and antiquarian works of the late century were carried out by what might be termed ‘amateurs’: Cooper’s *Athenae Cantabrigienses* (1858) and Boase’s *Bibliotheca Cornubienses* (1874-82) are amongst these. The creation of the *New English Dictionary*, later known as the *OED*, of which the first part appeared in 1884, was a similarly monumental enterprise dependent on amateurs. As John Kenyon describes, ‘with the exception of Stubbs, all the English historians of the High Victorian era were amateurs, usually resident in or around London, and existing on private incomes or the proceeds of higher journalism.’⁴⁵¹ Appeals for information in the *Athenaeum* provided the idea, however misleading, that anyone could contribute to the dictionary: all that was required was real knowledge and enthusiasm.

In fact, the *DNB* lay at the centre of a turning point between amateurism and professionalism. The project developed alongside a number of other historical enterprises that sought to organise the historical archives of the nation and promote scholarly research, such as the cataloguing of Government records (1862), the cataloguing of manuscripts in private collections (1869), and the cataloguing of the British Museum collections. Stephen’s concern with ‘the chaos of materials which is already so vast and so rapidly accumulating’⁴⁵² was widely shared, and old-fashioned means of researching and writing no longer seemed viable

⁴⁵¹ John Kenyon, *The History Men* (Pittsburgh, 1983), p. 100.

⁴⁵² Stephen, ‘Biography’, p. 174.

in the face of multiplying archives. T. F. Tout, as a professor at the University of Manchester and *DNB* contributor, could be counted amongst the professionals, yet he admitted that

like many Oxford men of my generation I approached historical investigation without the least training or guidance in historical method, and felt very much at a loss how to set to work. The careful and stringent regulations which [Stephen] drew up, and the brusque but kindly way in which he enforced obedience to them, constituted for many of us our first training in anything like original investigation.⁴⁵³

The first few months of gathering contributors were certainly somewhat chaotic. Gradually, however, the editors worked towards tightening the reins of the enterprise and offering the reader reliable and professional guides to the lives included in the dictionary rather than a heterogeneous group of amateurs and private enthusiasts. Grosart, who was found to have plagiarized existing biographical entries, was rapidly excluded from the project. Stephen lost patience with E. A. Freeman's insistence upon maintaining the original spelling of Anglo-Saxon names and became more severe with contributors of unrestrained prolixity.⁴⁵⁴ More significantly, Stephen became increasingly keen to reduce the number of contributors and to rely on a trustworthy group of writers. He writes to Gosse in 1885 that 'I am trying for many reasons to form a regular staff upon whom I can depend for this kind of work & have had to throw overboard a whole batch of contributors lately. It is very inconvenient to have a large list.'⁴⁵⁵ It was eventually determined that William Hunt and Thomas Finlayson Henderson, for example, would receive a regular salary for their contributions. What is significant is that, from a project of national commemoration to which almost anyone, it seemed, could contribute, there emerged a narrower group who took control.

The important presence of a third group of contributors reinforces the sense that the *DNB* fostered a certain clubishness. Almost inevitably, given Leslie Stephen's background,

⁴⁵³ Quoted in Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London, 1984), p. 86.

⁴⁵⁴ See LS to Austin Dobson, 10 May 1886, on denying Charles Kent an article on such grounds. Austin Dobson Papers, *Senate House, London*. Letters. MS 810.

⁴⁵⁵ LS to Edmund Gosse, 31 March 1885. Gosse Papers. *Br.L*.BC Gosse correspondence.

was the involvement of many members of the Clapham Sect. The original families, evangelical Christians reaching back to the late eighteenth century, included the Wilberforces, Thorntons, and Stephens, came to particular prominence through their campaign against the slave trade. Their descendants pursued their missionary and reform work (though some, notably Leslie Stephen himself, declared their agnosticism). They remained influential in philanthropic endeavours and public life, and became renowned for expressing anti-establishment views (though many of the families originally worked in Parliament in the early nineteenth century). Their concerns in the mid- to late nineteenth century included a wide range of social reforms, from university reforms to the extension of women's education. Many of the Sect's members, but also their friends and sympathisers, participated in the *DNB* as contributors and wrote lives of their own families. For this group of intellectuals, biography was a powerful tool, which confirmed the importance of the subject's contribution to the nation, and the biographer's loyalty to the group and desire to perpetuate its vision. The contributions of many of these subjects certainly did merit a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The huge presence of these lives, however, and that of its members as contributors of the articles, confirmed their intellectual pre-eminence, at a time when changes in the universities and professions meant that their pre-eminence would begin to be tested.

The presence of the Sect within the *DNB* mirrored the tension between inclusion and exclusion that pervaded discussions of who to include as subjects in the dictionary. Collini's study *Public Moralists* paints a picture of the mid- to late-Victorian intelligentsia who were members of, or had affinities with, the Clapham Sect. He considers that 'professions, like clubs, are about excluding people.'⁴⁵⁶ The sense of belonging to an intimate network was actively fostered. Many dinners, principally organised by George Smith, were given for contributors, during which, in between 'poulard braisé à l'estragon' and 'soufflés de merlan

⁴⁵⁶ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists* (Oxford, 1993), p. 237.

au vin blanc', speeches of mutual congratulation and encouragement were made.⁴⁵⁷ The *Athenaeum*-based exchanges bear some distant resemblance to the discussions of the gentlemen's clubs of the eighteenth century, and indeed many of the *Athenaeum*-reading contributors belonged to the gentleman's club of the same name. Letters from one Francis Espinasse, author of *Lancashire Worthies* (1874) and biographies of Voltaire and Ernest Renan, touchingly show one man trying hard to enter the circle. He writes to his friend the Reverend J. Norwood, who knew Leslie Stephen, as 'the only friend of his with whom I have the pleasure of being acquainted';⁴⁵⁸ when he came to write to Stephen himself, his tone is self-effacing yet eager ('I supposed that you would be besieged by applicants like myself' and 'wished to be near the door sometime before it opened').⁴⁵⁹ In the event, he was given seventy-one lives to write.

The network was thus not watertight. Yet the important presence of contributors from a similar background has several implications. That these figures dominated the dictionary helps to explain the distinct privileging of 'intellectual' pursuits over, say, business and entrepreneurial activities in the work. Another consequence is that, as Cockshut notes, 'for those who died after about 1850 there is a more intimate note. [...] Everyone knows everyone else; a hint of particular foibles may serve better than a statement. After all, the candidate will one day be a candidate for discussion in a later supplement.'⁴⁶⁰ Importantly, it also enabled Leslie Stephen to promote a form of intellectual labour and perpetuate the notion of a group of intellectuals working for the nation.

⁴⁵⁷ *DNB: Circulars, Menus of Complimentary Dinners in Connection with the Undertaking* (1888-1894).

⁴⁵⁸ Francis Espinasse to Reverend J. Norwood, 10 November 1882. Leslie Stephen, letters related to DNB. *Bodleian*. MS Don e 121.

⁴⁵⁹ Francis Espinasse to LS, 14 November 1882. *Ibid*.

⁴⁶⁰ A. O. J. Cockshut, 'The Century of the *DNB*', *TLS* (April 26, 1985), p. 466.

To a certain extent, the *DNB* enabled Leslie Stephen to promote different types of 'obscure' lives who contributed to the nation and to provide greater visibility to such labour. This included intellectual labour. An unusual feature of the dictionary is the variance of style between entries. To some extent, the *DNB* departed from the neutral style expected of a scholarly reference work, and thus gave a greater visibility and recognition to the scholars who might otherwise have laboured in obscurity. Unsurprisingly, it was Stephen who favoured such an approach, whilst Lee, when he took over the reigns of the work, encouraged a greater harmonisation and standardisation of styles and form. Stephen had debated with George Smith upon how much liberty to leave his contributors. Having considered the question of uniformity of referencing, quoting and spelling, he wrote that 'I think myself that in this matter certainly & perhaps in others, it is a mistake to have rules too rigid. I would leave it to contributors to exercise a considerable discretion in such matters. However this is open to discussion'.⁴⁶¹ One reviewer in the *Academy* objected, as Lee would, to what he felt was a neglect of scholarly standards, and found that 'strange to say, Mr Stephen apparently leaves his contributors to do as they please. Some give even the fugitive sermons of obscure clergymen ("J. D. Burns"); others give selections. Some give lists without dates; others, again, give lists and dates of successive editors of books absolutely without importance.'⁴⁶²

Stephen's editorial decision, characteristically, created a larger space for entertainment and human particularity in the dictionary. His own entries are full of examples of his characteristically dry wit. Stephen characterizes Robert Owen as 'one of those intolerable bores who are the salt of the earth',⁴⁶³ William Godwin as a 'venerable horseleech',⁴⁶⁴ and it

⁴⁶¹ LS to George Smith, 21 September 1884. Smith, Elder Papers. *NLS*. MSS. 23175-6.

⁴⁶² [Unsigned], 'The Dictionary of National Biography. Edited by Leslie Stephen. Vol. VII', *The Academy*, 743 (July 31, 1886), p. 65.

⁴⁶³ Leslie Stephen, 'Owen, Robert (1771-1858)', *DNB*, vol. XIV, p. 1345

⁴⁶⁴ Leslie Stephen, 'Godwin, William, the elder (1756-1836)', *DNB*, vol. VIII, p.67.

is declared that ‘criticism of Burns is only permitted to Scotchmen of pure blood.’⁴⁶⁵ The *Athenaeum* noted that ‘wit and epigram are not specially suited to the pages of a book of reference; but occasionally Mr. Stephen allows himself to lighten his task by one of his keen touches’.⁴⁶⁶ Such phrases played havoc with the sober, detached and concise tone expected of a dictionary. They also established a warmer relationship with the reader.

Beyond this, the privileging of individual voice over scholarly standardisation shows a resistance to consider the *Dictionary* as a whole, and to break it down instead into parts. Stephen’s decision calls attention to the individual voices speaking beneath an apparently uniform discourse. Stefan Collini notes of the general movement away from ‘men of letters’ to professional writers and scholars in the late nineteenth century that critics frequently seemed to resist the disappearance of the ‘still recognizable figure of the gentleman of letters’ and the ‘unworldly remoteness’ that seemed to belong to the new generation of specialists.’⁴⁶⁷ Stephen displayed a similar anxiety. Collini’s analysis once again draws attention to the tension between hidden and visible labour. The two figures of the ‘man of letters’ and the ‘scholar’ can be recognized in the two personalities of Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. Stephen’s approach to style within the dictionary reveals his ambivalence towards the disappearance of the traditional man of letters.

Yet Stephen was uncertain concerning the extent to which the scholars should act as authoritative guides for the subjects they were commemorating. Despite his encouragement of individual style, he wrote that the dictionary-maker and contributor ‘must restrain his rhetoric and sentiment and philosophical reflection within the narrowest bounds. [...] The dictionary-maker can at most give a brief indication of the opinions held by good authorities and a reference to the books where they are discussed; and, possibly, may intimate summarily his

⁴⁶⁵ Leslie Stephen, ‘Burns, Robert (1759-1796)’, *DNB*, vol. III, p. 436.

⁴⁶⁶ [Untitled], *Athenaeum*, (October 16, 1886), p. 493.

⁴⁶⁷ Collini, *Public Moralists*, pp. 204-5.

own conclusions.’⁴⁶⁸ The statement sits uneasily with a later comment, made in the same essay, that the writer should ‘appear to be simply relating a plain narrative, when he is really dictating the verdict’.⁴⁶⁹ The balance of power between biographer and reader constantly shifts, as does what the reader can and cannot expect from the dictionary. Though Stephen strongly believed in the reader’s imaginative contribution to the biographical sketch, he also gave to the biographer the power to direct the reader’s mind: ‘he may put the narrative so that the comment or criticism is tacitly insinuated into the mind of his reader’.⁴⁷⁰ Stephen depicts a teasing relationship between biographer and reader: ‘The reader should ask for more and should not get it’; the biographer must proceed ‘sternly’.⁴⁷¹ What remains constant throughout these modulated statements is the importance that there *exist* a relationship between biographer and reader within the dictionary. The reader is not given (or not allowed to think that he or she has) an unmediated access to the biographical subject. The biographer affects discretion whilst subtly reminding the reader of his presence through style and judgement. Once again, the visibility of the biographer is key.

Reviewers remarked upon the unusual visibility of the dictionary’s contributor. They enjoyed the emergence of a dominating, cohesive group of contributors as guides to the dictionary’s many subjects. Gradually, reviewers picked up upon the recurring names and identified contributors with particular groups of subjects. A review of the seventh and eighth volumes concludes with the comment that

the subjects requiring special or technical knowledge are for the most part in the same hands as in the earlier volumes. Mr. Joseph Knight has several valuable volumes. [...] Mr. A. H. Bullen has several opportunities of showing his acquaintance with byways of English literature [...]. Prof. Laughton continues to supply the lives of sailors, and is gradually overcoming a tendency to regard every naval officer as a personage of profound importance.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Stephen, ‘Biography’, p. 172.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 173.

⁴⁷⁰ Stephen, ‘Biography’, p. 172.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, p. 181.

⁴⁷² [Unsigned review of *DNB*, vols. VII-VIII], *Athenaeum*, 3077 (October 16, 1886), p. 494.

The tone suggests that the specialists were not so to begin with, but have become so through their experience with the *DNB* and the ‘opportunities’ of demonstrating expertise. The gently teasing reference to Laughton reveals the reviewers’ pleasant familiarity with these contributors, and conveys the sense that the project was coming into its own. By the eleventh volume, a reviewer could state that ‘the articles requiring special or technical knowledge are, for the most part, written by the group of specialists who are by this time well known to Mr. Stephen’s readers.’⁴⁷³ The tone becomes even warmer for the fourteenth to the eighteenth volumes, where it is noted that ‘Mr. Leslie Stephen’s staff adheres to him with almost touching fidelity’.⁴⁷⁴ The phrase is interesting as the emotion the reviewer detects cannot be sensed in the succession of entries, but is projected on to the dictionary by readers responding to an impression of intimacy. The reviewers express a hunger for guidance amidst the mass of information being presented to them. The eagerness to stress the authorship of individual articles and to differentiate between styles shows a desire on the reviewers’ part as well as Leslie Stephen to create, perhaps even artificially, a more cosy and familiar relationship with the commemorative project. It reinforces the need for a mediator between the biographical subject and the wider public.

The *Dictionary* and the Nation

The *DNB* was one of many similar enterprises throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century that used the dictionary or encyclopaedia as a form of nation-building. The Belgian *Biographie Nationale* was launched in 1866; the German *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* closely followed German unification in the 1870s. The French had published a work of universal biography, *Nouvelle Biographie Universelle*, between 1852 and 1866, but

⁴⁷³ [Unsigned review of *DNB* vols. XI-XIII], *Athenaeum*, 3146 (February 11, 1888), p. 173.

⁴⁷⁴ [Unsigned review of *DNB*, vols. XIV-XVIII], *Athenaeum*, 3208 (April 20, 1889), p. 500.

began talks at the end of the century for a work of national dimensions. The importance of biographical dictionaries in consolidating national identities has often been analysed.⁴⁷⁵ What has received almost no attention, whether in the *DNB* or the other European projects, is the meaning assigned within them to the ‘obscure’ and ‘second-rate’ as an image of that nation. It is important to pause on the patriotic and national resonances of the *DNB* to understand the complex position attributed to ‘hidden lives’.

Numerous reviewers of the *Dictionary of National Biography* responded to it as patriots. H. S. Ashbee had originally welcomed the project by stating that the country had suffered ‘the stigma of not possessing a national biographical dictionary.’⁴⁷⁶ By the time that the final, sixty-third, volume was published, an *Athenaeum* reviewer could boisterously claim that ‘our British lexicographers have had the satisfaction of administering a handsome beating to their most formidable competitors, the Germans’.⁴⁷⁷ J. S. Cotton, writing in the *Academy*, felt that the disadvantages under which English students had laboured, compared with ‘their brethren in Germany or France’, were coming to an end.⁴⁷⁸ Sidney Lee himself placed the *DNB* project in the context of such rivalries, by declaring it a far more ‘earnest endeavour’ to satisfy ‘the just patriotic instinct’ than the attempts in ‘Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria, and Sweden.’⁴⁷⁹ This faintly ridiculous competitiveness makes sense in the context of the rise of a new form of nationalistic feeling in the late nineteenth century. Though the idea that nationalism was ‘invented’ in the nineteenth century has rightly been questioned,⁴⁸⁰ what is easier to maintain is that new energy was given to the question of what constituted a nation.

⁴⁷⁵ See, for example, Ian McCalman et al (eds.), *National Biographies & National Identity* (Canberra, 1996).

⁴⁷⁶ Ashbee, ‘A New ‘Biographia Britannica’, p. 17.

⁴⁷⁷ [Unsigned], ‘*Dictionary of National Biography*’, *Athenaeum*, 3794 (July 14, 1900), p. 45.

⁴⁷⁸ J. S. Cotton [review of *DNB* vol. I], *The Academy*, 661 (January 3, 1885), p. 2.

⁴⁷⁹ Lee, ‘Statistical Account’, p. lxii.

⁴⁸⁰ See a survey of the various dates suggested for the ‘discovery of patriotism’, in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of a British National Identity*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London, 1989), pp. lvii–lix.

Ernest Renan had addressed the issue in his seminal 1882 lecture ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation’. In this lecture he dismisses race, language, religion and even geography as the principle components of national identity. He concludes that

a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.⁴⁸¹

Once again, the nation is defined, to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase, as a kind of ‘imagined community’. The expression of that community would seem to be ideally found in a biographical dictionary. If a nation is partly defined by the sheer ‘will’ of its citizens to celebrate its heritage, then the proud declarations of the dictionary reviewers appear as an attempt at crucial national self-definition.

The *DNB* was one of many projects that, as John Kijinski writes, ‘worked to establish for a wide readership a notion of a shared, organic English culture, one that united all citizens of the nation regardless of class or religion’.⁴⁸² (This ‘organic’ quality may have been helped by the fact that it was many of the same men who contributed to the different projects. Theodore Martin, for example, contributed lives to both the *Encyclopedia* and the *Dictionary*; Austin Dobson, Sidney Colvin and others contributed to both the *DNB* and the *English Men of Letters*, as did Leslie Stephen. A reader seeking for diverse views of an author may have been disappointed.) Reviewers frequently discussed these projects together. The *Edinburgh Review* described the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, The *Dictionary of National Biography* and *New English Dictionary* as ‘the high-water mark of the literary acquirements of this century,’ and paid homage those who had thus placed ‘before the British public a vast and exhaustive

⁴⁸¹ Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, (1882), repr. *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford, 1996), p. 52.

⁴⁸² John Kijinski, ‘John Morley’s “English Men of Letters” series and the politics of reading’, *VS*, 34 (1991), p. 207.

repertory of the science, the literature, and the language of this country in the present age.’⁴⁸³

The short, well-researched biographies such as the ‘English Men of Letters’ and ‘Twelve English Statesmen’ that began to multiply at this time partook of the same spirit. Leslie Stephen described such cultural endeavours in a language close to Ernest Renan’s. In depicting the British Museum as the ‘externalized memory of the race’,⁴⁸⁴ he pointed towards an idea of the nation that was based less on sharp definitions based on geography or even language than on an assembly of disparate elements of varying cultural and emotional resonance.

Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee once again found themselves at odds on the notion of patriotism and nationhood. Lee’s confidence in the superiority of the British project was matched by his confidence in the progress of the British nation. As a dictionary that includes subject’s lives alphabetically rather than chronologically, the work itself does not offer a progressive narrative. Yet Lee worked to restore this through his ‘Statistical Account’. The result is an example of the Whig view of history that saw progress displayed by successive centuries. Lee finds that the number of individuals deemed sufficiently worthy to be included increases with each century (one in six thousand for the seventeenth century; one in four thousand for nineteenth-century subjects). Lee does briefly consider that the superiority of nineteenth-century achievements may be partially explained by a natural tendency to inflate contemporary events. Yet, he pursues,

by the multiplication of intellectual callings – take engineering and its offshoots, for example – and by the specialisation of science and art, the opportunities of distinction [...] have been of late conspicuously augmented. Improvements in educational machinery may, too, have enlarged the volume of the nation’s intellectual capacity.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ [Unsigned], ‘The Literature and Language of the Age’, *ER* (1889), p. 328.

⁴⁸⁴ Stephen, ‘Biography’, p. 174

⁴⁸⁵ Lee, ‘Statistical Account’, pp. lxix-lxx

Lee's words found an echo with an *Edinburgh Review* critic who saw the *DNB* itself, and not simply the lives included, as 'a striking proof of the advancement of civilisation' and 'honourably characteristic of the present age.'⁴⁸⁶ The key idea here is that of progress; a more complex narrative of historical development is occluded. Though criminals and misfits are included in the work, they cannot impede the inevitable forwards march of British civilization.

Stephen expressed far more caution regarding both British and nineteenth-century superiority. Indeed, the *DNB* was not elaborated in the starkly patriotic terms with which it was received. George Smith's initial plan had been for a universal rather than a national biography, until the project was scaled down. Manageability, rather than patriotism, was the issue. The omission of a preface meant that the definition of the nation was fluid, and one of the early names considered for the work was simply 'the new biographical dictionary'. For Elizabeth Baigent, the 'failure or refusal to define which nation or nations the *DNB* covers was adroit, but perhaps also arrogant, making it incumbent upon others to define their terms'.⁴⁸⁷ Another view would be that the editors deliberately avoided entering into the controversial subject of national identity. Carlyle's support for a project of a specifically Scottish portrait gallery suggests that the nation put forward by the dictionary could be countered by very different ideas of national pride and belonging.

The omission can also be explained by Stephen's suspicion of contemporary patriotism. Patriotic language was used somewhat loosely in the early half of the nineteenth century, but developed closer affiliations with the Conservatives in the 1870s. The more Liberal Leslie Stephen expressed opposition to this change in the 1870 essay 'National Antipathies' published in the *Cornhill*, and signed 'A Cynic'. The article vigorously pooh-

⁴⁸⁶ [Untitled], *ER* (April 1889), p. 350.

⁴⁸⁷ Elizabeth Baigent, 'Nationality and Dictionaries of National Biography', in *National Biographies & National Identity*, p. 63.

poohs contemporary suggestions of England's superiority and denies that the English are happier or wiser than others. Ridicule is heaped upon the Englishman's 'keen perception of the notorious inferiority of all other races', as expressed in the assumption that 'an American is, of course, a bad imitation of a Briton'. For Stephen, 'our sympathies and antipathies, as applied to foreign nations, are, for the most part, mere fancies.'⁴⁸⁸ The essay is above all a defence of scepticism in the face of uniformity.

The degree to which Stephen countered the possible nationalistic overtones of the project can be overestimated. Nevertheless, a reading of the *DNB* as a somewhat cosmopolitan project is possible. The first and last name of the dictionary, those of the Frenchman Jacques Abbadie and the Dutchman William Henry Zuytlestein, reflect this. The response was mixed. The *Athenaeum* could not understand why 'complete foreigners, such as De Baan the painter and some of the Dillons, are included'.⁴⁸⁹ For R.C. Christie, such a broad spectrum was instead to be celebrated, and he salutes the 'numbers of foreign soldiers, scholars, divines, painters, sculptors, and men of science, to whom England has given a hospitable welcome, which they have abundantly repaid by associating themselves with, and adding in several ways to, the glories of their adopted country'.⁴⁹⁰ Christie echoed Stephen in applauding the dictionary's ability to 'illustrate the cosmopolitan character of our nation'.⁴⁹¹ Their presence serves, once again, to gently question a simple, cohesive reading of the dictionary and the nation it seeks to represent.

It might seem surprising that one who declared in 1870 that 'we ought to be graceful cosmopolites, acknowledging no ties of country, free from all vulgar prejudices' and that 'patriots, as a general rule, seem to me to be a very hotheaded and noxious set of people'⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁸ Leslie Stephen, 'National Antipathies', *CM*, 21 (February 1870), p. 156.

⁴⁸⁹ [Unsigned review of *DNB*, vols. XIV-XVIII], *Athenaeum*, 3208 (April 20, 1889), p. 500.

⁴⁹⁰ R. C. Christie, *QR* (Jan-April 1887), p. 366.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 367.

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, p. 163.

should edit a work of national biography some twelve years later. However, Stephen viewed biographical dictionaries as a form that convincingly disproved assertions of national superiority. The biographical dictionary stressed diversity, and welcomed tales of both success and failure. Whilst the project as a whole could be, and was, recuperated by fervent patriots, a reader could see it as a celebration of diversity and dissent.

Stephen enjoyed the ability of the dictionary to create debate. The fact that the project was launched by a private citizen rather than the state was repeatedly drawn attention to as a strength. This loudly-proclaimed independence from the state gains significance if one considers Habermas's argument that state interventionism had dramatically increased since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, bringing the liberal era to a close. Debate provided Stephen with a means to celebrate a kind of public sphere that was under threat. What is equally striking is that in rejoicing in the lack of state intervention, the editor was once more stressing the importance of the individuals that contribute to the nation, rather than the nation itself as a concept.

Though Stephen pioneered the sociological study of literature, it is difficult to glean from the *Dictionary of National Biography* his stance on the relationship between historical context and individual achievement. The format of the biographical entry necessarily detaches the subject from historical context, and reduces the space available for sociological commentary. Instead, the succession of unrelated, non-chronological entries creates a strong impression of the huge importance of individual effort. Stephen himself was attracted to Romantic ideas of self-realization and took upon himself to write many of the lives of Romantic poets and philosophers. What the *DNB* celebrates above all is the individual, rather

than the nation. The dictionary revived the ancient idea that Britain was ‘a nation of individualists.’⁴⁹³

The *DNB* avoided the boisterous patriotism of many of its reviews, but replaced it with a more subtle celebration of national identity. As Colin Matthew, editor of the new *ODNB* exclaims, in terms even more explicitly patriotic than nineteenth-century reviewers of the dictionary, the *DNB* ‘transcends the ranks of ordinary reference books and epitomises the best characteristics of the British mind by being open, fair, liberal, accurate and quirky.’⁴⁹⁴ Whether the British mind was and is all that Matthew claims is matter for another debate; what is significant is that this was the image that the *DNB* sought to project. This openness created a space for lesser-known subjects. When these were included, it is not as groups, such as the ‘working-class’ or ‘women’, but as individuals. The undefined, unlimited category of this group of subjects, which Stephen variously refers to as the ‘obscure’, ‘second-rate’, ‘forgotten’, has no precise linguistic, sociological or epistemological definition.

Many biographers of obscure lives developed the theme of eccentricity to explain how an individual living on the margins could also bring a vital contribution to the nation. Leslie Stephen used the theme in a similar way to J. S. Mill in *On Liberty*, or William Jolly in his *Life of John Duncan*, or Alexander Gilchrist in his biography of *Blake*, by identifying eccentricity with strength of character. Stefan Collini argues that ‘pride in the national literature’s special talent for expressing a rich diversity of life and feeling [...] in turn provided an important buttress for those soaring claims about how English individualism and its admirable respect for eccentricity had proved to be particularly favourable soil for the propagation of political liberty’.⁴⁹⁵ The *Dictionary* makes a similar reading possible. In his *DNB* entry on the author Thomas Day, Leslie Stephen states that ‘his amusing eccentricities

⁴⁹³ Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism*, p. xxvii.

⁴⁹⁴ Matthew, ‘The New DNB’, p. 11.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 358.

were indeed only the symptom of a real nobility of character, too deeply in earnest to submit to the ordinary compromises of society.’⁴⁹⁶ The inclusion of an obscure subject played a similar role to that of an eccentric one. It confirmed the liberality and diversity of the nation in a form that could hardly be seen as subversive.

British reviewers believed that the inclusion of obscure lives was a particularity of the *DNB*, and praised it as one of the major strengths of the work. The uniqueness of the obscure to the *DNB* must be mitigated. The *Belgian Biographie Nationale* (1866-1938), published by their national science, literature and fine arts Royal academy, and, unlike the *DNB*, supported by the government, did address the issue. In contrast to the *DNB*, the Belgian dictionary provided a scrupulously lengthy preface to discuss such editorial decisions. For the editors, obscure lives are of specifically national interest: they can be of no interest to foreign readers, but constitute part of the pride that a citizen may feel for his country.⁴⁹⁷ Interestingly, the preface employs the words ‘welcoming’ (‘accueillir’) and ‘hospitality’⁴⁹⁸ to describe the act of including less eminent individuals into its pages, which suggests the generous impulse of the nation which the dictionary represents.

The Belgian dictionary spells out in far clearer terms than the *Dictionary* the political import of the work. The word ‘hospitality’ gently suggest the idea of biography acting as a refuge for the neglected. The preface points to another, very different, case of making known subjects who have been forgotten or misremembered. The preface notes that many Belgian nationals who left the country and achieved eminence abroad took on, or were attributed, different names, which meant that Belgian nationals had lost trace of them. In view of this, the ‘*Biographie nationale* will possess a truly patriotic import. People will be astonished to

⁴⁹⁶ Leslie Stephen, ‘Day, Thomas (1748-1789), *DNB*, vol. V, p. 691.

⁴⁹⁷ ‘De là l’admission dans un livre de cette espèce d’un nombre considerable d’hommes, peut-être dépourvus de valeur pour les étrangers, mais que le souci d’un amour-propre national bien entendu fait une loi d’accueillir,’ *Biographie Nationale de Belgique* (Bruxelles, 1866), vol. I, p. x.

⁴⁹⁸ ‘Il convenait, en effet, de composer un livre où tous les Belges remarquables, n’importe à quell titre, reçussent l’hospitalité’, *Biographie nationale*, vol. I, p. xiii.

discover the number of eminent Belgians who have been stripped of their nationality, either intentionally or by mistake, to turn them into foreign celebrities.’⁴⁹⁹ This tug-of-war over dictionary subjects further reveals the political import of such works. It also suggests that it is around the lesser, rather than famous, names that some of the most important struggles to define the nation are fought. Stephen did not reject a national perspective altogether. Though he avoided the patriotic outbursts indulged in by so many reviewers, he was concerned with the manner in which ‘obscure’ men and women did have a crucial role to play in maintaining the foundations of the nation.

Remembering and Forgetting

Leslie Stephen’s stance on obscure lives did not initiate with the *DNB* but was the fruit of a long contemplation on their role in society. In his articles, he does not claim for them a straightforward recognition but develops a complex argument in which the obscure function above all as moral stimulants who can, in fact, return to obscurity once their purpose has been served. Just as the reviewers welcomed the inclusion of second-rate lives before ensuring that the attention they received was in proportion to their apparent importance, so does Stephen repeatedly move between the impetus to remember and forget.

The essay ‘Forgotten Benefactors’ is essential to understand Stephen’s relationship with the obscure. Stephen wrote the essay in part as a memorial to his wife Julia Stephen, who died in 1895 (and also prompted his ‘Mausoleum Book’), and it was published in his 1896 volume of philosophical and critical essays, *Social Rights and Duties: Addresses to Ethical Societies*. It was also a response to the essay ‘The Wealth of Nature’, published in 1859 by his brother James Fitzjames Stephen, who had pursued an illustrious legal career and gained

⁴⁹⁹ ‘Sous ce rapport, la *Biographie nationale* rendra des services réellement patriotiques. On sera étonné de voir le nombre de Belges remarquables qu’on a dépouillés de leur nationalité, soit par erreur, soit avec intention, pour en faire des célébrités étrangères.’ *Biographie Nationale*, vol. I, p. xvii

further renown by publishing a rejection of Mill's *On Liberty*. In the biography of his brother that he published during this same period, Leslie Stephen pauses to consider this 'striking' essay.⁵⁰⁰

James Fitzjames Stephen varies in the appellation he gives to the 'hidden benefactors' of his essay: they are in turn the 'obscure' and the 'unknown' (the former are deemed as having gained slightly more recognition than the latter).⁵⁰¹ The principal thrust of the essay is the extent to which the nation depends for its wealth and health on hidden and unrecognized labour. For Stephen, it is 'impossible to exaggerate the importance of the social functions discharged by able men whose abilities are superior to the reputation which they earn' (50). 'Obscure labours' have a crucial part to play for the nation. The patriotic dimension of the essay is important, and Stephen, a noted patriot, echoes Sidney Lee more than Leslie Stephen in considering 'the aggregate ability of those who, in less than thirty generations, have changed the England of King Alfred into the England of Queen Victoria' (51). By including lives that reflected those abilities the *DNB* chose to give a rare importance to the idea of the dependence of the nation on unrecognised merit. Here, as in the *DNB*, the inclusion of the obscure may be compared to the inclusion of endless domestic objects within the Great Exhibition of 1851: the apparent cult of the ordinary acts as a testament to the strength, solidarity and productivity of Great Britain and its empire.

The idea had of course been developed before, and Leslie Stephen saw his brother's essays a 'sermon upon the text of Gray's reflection in the "Elegy"'.⁵⁰² James Stephen does dwell on the 'Elegy' - Gray is invoked, surprisingly, as an example of a man who may have gained more recognition than poets of equal talent – but his influence is palpable. Though George Eliot is not named in the essay, her presence is invoked through the repeated allusions

⁵⁰⁰ Leslie Stephen, *The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1895), p. 170.

⁵⁰¹ James Fitzjames Stephen, 'The Wealth of Nature' (1859), repr. in *Essays by a Barrister* (London, 1862), pp. 48-57.

⁵⁰² Stephen, *James Fitzjames Stephen*, p. 170.

to ‘unseen influence’ and the ‘obscure effects, which are traceable only in their remote consequences by a careful observer’ (52). (Eliot’s fame had increased that same year with the publication of *Adam Bede*.) These are all elements that Leslie Stephen would later pick up and develop.

Leslie Stephen was strongly influenced by ‘The Wealth of Nature’ in his thoughts on obscure lives and in his work for the *DNB*. ‘Forgotten Benefactors’ is a similar declaration of the key importance of the obscure to national prosperity, and of the necessity of keeping the obscure suitably obscure. There are differences in Leslie Stephen’s essay. He creates a sharper opposition between great lives (the ‘great statesmen, the great churchmen and warriors [who] are commemorated in our official histories’, 15) and humble ones. The ability of obscure lives to stimulate the reader’s imagination is also absent from his brother’s earlier essay. The word ‘benefactors’ also suggests a link with Thomas Carlyle, who asked readers to ‘look with reverence into the dark untenanted places of the Past, where, in formless oblivion, our chief benefactors, with all their sedulous endeavors, but not with the fruit of these, lie entombed.’⁵⁰³

Both James and Leslie Stephen draw attention to various categories of ‘obscure’ workers, which is in itself unusual. For both, there are the more obvious categories of labourer and, with Leslie Stephen, of women, or what one might consider to be relatively powerless lives. There is also the category of those whose professions lead to the diffusion of good: James Fitzjames Stephen gives the example of ‘the curates of country villages, and the obscure philanthropists’ (50), Leslie Stephen points to Samuel Johnson’s commemoration of Dr. Levett (236). These can attain to a short-lived ‘picturesque and typical glory’, and tend to have a local importance. The members of the third category contribute to the intellectual

⁵⁰³ Carlyle, ‘On History’, p. 58.

health of the nation: they are the ‘professionals’. These are the lawyers, the architects, the professors and, of most importance for Stephen, the men of letters.

Indeed, more than the championing of unknown labourers and women (of which few are included), the *DNB*, both in the process of its creation and in its final result, is a celebration of a different kind of hidden labour: intellectual labour. Leslie Stephen repeatedly insisted on the importance of including as many authors as possible within the *DNB*, to the extent that it was estimated that anyone who had published at least ten works, whatever their quality, was guaranteed inclusion. More strikingly, Stephen’s letters and essays reveal that he contemplated literary work and his own impressive editorial efforts as a form of work that bore some resemblance to more manual labour. Both Sidney Lee and Leslie Stephen saw the *DNB* as a factory-like enterprise, and use the imagery of machinery to describe it. For Lee, the comparison was a flattering one; for Stephen, it was potentially alienating. Considering the advantages of biography as a form of commemoration against those of poetic memorials, Lee praised the former as a ‘prosaic, yet more accessible and more adaptable, machinery’⁵⁰⁴ capable of admitting ‘with unerring precision, everyone who has excited the nation’s commemorative instincts’; the end product would be kept in the ‘well-planned storehouse of national biography’.⁵⁰⁵ The enterprise is to be productive and efficient.

Whereas Lee conveys the image of a successful Victorian industrialist, Stephen’s language situates himself amidst the harassed factory workers: ‘to write a life is to collect the particular heap of rubbish in which his material is contained, to sift the relevant from the superincumbent mass, and then try to smelt it and cast it into its natural mould.’⁵⁰⁶ For the older editor, the idea of the machine, with its overtones of dehumanisation, was a source of anxiety rather than pride. The image recurs in his letters, as ‘the infernal Dictionary must be

⁵⁰⁴ Lee, ‘National Biography’, p. 14.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

⁵⁰⁶ Stephen ‘Biography’, p. 174.

kept going'.⁵⁰⁷ By 1887, he felt that he had 'been dragged into the damnable thing by fate like a careless workman passing moving machinery'.⁵⁰⁸ Cultural critics at this time frequently alluded to machinery imagery to convey the expanse of knowledge and the challenges involved in controlling it. The comparison of manual and intellectual labour signals Stephen's attempts to gain recognition for literary and editorial work in a way that suggests that it is also an essential contribution to the national landscape.

Literary work is seen less as a personal than a communal concern. Paying tribute to hidden or second-rate men of letters therefore recognises their labour in an unusually concrete manner, something that no doubt gained importance in Stephen's eyes at a time when the figure of the old-fashioned man of letters was under threat. There is something of this in his efforts to bring recognition to the increasingly dedicated group of contributors who worked for him on the *DNB*, most of whom were scholars or amateurs with possibly local but certainly not widespread national acclaim. The celebration of less flamboyant literary labours takes on a more personal aspect when one considers Stephen's repeated assertions that he was himself a failure. It is worth bearing in mind Leslie Stephen's legendary self-dramatizations. When he depicted himself as a mediocrity, or footnote 'of the history of English thought in the nineteenth century' – which he often did – it was with a mixture of stark self-awareness and self-pity.⁵⁰⁹ Yet it is hard to avoid speculating that the defence of second-rate lives masked a more personal investment in championing, or at least justifying the value of, second-rate talent.

An important strand in 'The Wealth of Nature' that Leslie Stephen picked up was James Fitzjames Stephen's argument that the beneficial influence of the obscure relies to a

⁵⁰⁷ LS to G. Croom Robertson, 5 August 1883, quoted in Maitland, *Life and Letters*, pp. 378-9.

⁵⁰⁸ LS to Edmund Gosse, 24 October 1887. Gosse Papers, *Br.L.* BC Gosse Correspondence.

⁵⁰⁹ See Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 73.

significant extent upon their continued obscurity. Though homage can be paid to the group of hidden workers as a whole, 'the obscurity of the majority is absolutely necessary to the formation of the atmosphere which is essential to the development of the minority who attain celebrity' (55). Stephen supports his statement somewhat confusedly. On the one hand, he rejects Carlyle's emphasis on the importance of creating a 'whole world of heroes' by fearing that a nation in which there were no 'obscure' would create a dangerous and 'universal system of mammon-worship' (56). On the other hand, the maintenance of a balance between greater and lesser men confirms traditional ideas of hero-worship. Stephen concludes his argument with the insistence that, 'as things stands now [...] no one need be ashamed of his condition in life' (57). The celebration of a state of contended obscurity echoes Samuel Smiles's biographies of unknown naturalists, whose value rested on their obscurity, and his intense anxiety when one of his subjects made claims for a more permanent kind of fame. James Fitzjames Stephen does not concern himself with the genre of biography. It would appear, however, that an application of his ideas would make the biography of an obscure life an impossibility.

If anything, the paradox between remembering the obscure and keeping them in obscurity is even stronger in Leslie Stephen's work. He talks of doing 'justice to countless obscure benefactors' (233). Yet he also insists that 'obscurity is a condition, and by no means an altogether unpleasant one, of much of the very best work that is done'. Obscurity is a 'privilege' (235). Stephen does not directly confront the consequences of isolating and representing an obscure life in a biography. The paradox is never resolved within the essay, and is undoubtedly problematical. Stephen does, however, develop an argument concerning the individual's relation to an obscure life that is greatly relevant to the *DNB*.

An uncomfortable aspect of 'Forgotten Benefactors' is that Leslie Stephen becomes particularly adamant on the benefits of retaining certain benefactors in obscurity when he

addresses the issue of women's roles. It is ironic that, though the essay was meant as a tribute to Julia Stephen, she is a ghostly presence and is never named – she is another obscure influence on mankind. The ministering duties of womankind, for Stephen, are best carried out in the shade. Though the 'faculties of women should be cultivated as fully as possible', a woman bringing up 'brave men and women [...] might be doing something really more important than her conspicuous husband' (250-1). Throughout the essay, Stephen draws upon the somewhat hackneyed idea of the corrupting influences of fame, and declares that 'it is unwholesome to live in an atmosphere which constantly stimulates and incites the weaknesses to which we are most liable' (235). Though he does not make it explicit, this distance from public acclaim is deemed more appropriate for some 'obscures' than for others.

It is possible to make too much of the fact that Stephen used obscurity as an excuse for the confinement of women to private life, though there is certainly an element of that. However iconoclastic, Stephen was no radical. In *Men of Letters, Writing Lives*, Trev Broughton perceptively noted the more personal importance of forgetting in Stephen's autobiographical *Mausoleum Book*, in which forgetting 'is an individuating personal trait, an aesthetic trope and an ethics.'⁵¹⁰ It is a means of avoiding the morbid self-consciousness of which autobiographers were commonly accused, and which would disqualify him as a biographer.⁵¹¹ It also suggested to Stephen an ability to balance 'individualism with social responsibility'.⁵¹² Indeed, Stephen invites the reader to remember and then forget obscure biographical subjects as part of their moral responsibilities.

Whether the obscure are labourers, women, or men of letters, what binds the subjects is in fact less their status than the feelings that they can incite within the reader. Leslie

⁵¹⁰ Broughton, *Men of Letters, Writing Lives*, p. 57.

⁵¹¹ See Chapter 1.

⁵¹² Broughton, *Men of Letters, Writing Lives*, p. 57.

Stephen gives several justifications for including obscure subjects in the *DNB*: one is their scholarly interest, another is the amusement they can provide, and yet another is the imaginative leap they can prompt. Of at least equal importance is their moral potential. Stephen described James Fitzjames Stephen's essay as a 'sermon', even though there was little to suggest that in the essay itself. The word in fact reflects the moral emphasis that Leslie Stephen brought to the topic.

In 'Forgotten Benefactors', the act of paying tribute to obscure and second-rate lives is deemed a moral or charitable one. The word 'generous' recurs. Stephen asks whether it

is not true that, in every department of life, it is more congenial to our generous feelings to remember the existence and the importance of those who have never won a general reputation? (229).

Later in the essay, he insists that 'gratitude to the obscure is [...], I take it, a duty, which we cannot practise without a proportional moral benefit' (266). Such statements reflect Stephen's Clapham Sect heritage. The importance of ministering to the humble, and the evangelical duty of paying tribute to the meek, are an important element of Stephen's response, even though he confines his reflections to moral rather than religious terms. In this respect, he echoes the famous 'Finale' of *Middlemarch* which pays tribute to those who have 'lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs'.⁵¹³ (Stephen had the occasion to reflect at length on Eliot's work, both in the entry he wrote on her for the *DNB* and in his 1902 biography of her which he contributed to the 'English Men of Letters' series.) The presence of second-rate lives within the *DNB* enables Stephen similarly to celebrate those whose contributions are less visible. This does not, of course, address the many difficulties suggested by the selection of obscure subjects: how a 'hidden' life comes to public attention, the extent to which it is representative of other hidden lives, and whether its value does not rest precisely in being hidden.

⁵¹³ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 825.

Yet Stephen succeeds in bypassing the difficulty by implying that, finally, it is less the actual life that is of significance than the response a reader has to an obscure life. This is partly suggested by Stephen's choice of words: he oscillates between using the word 'obscure' and the word 'forgotten' to define this class of subject. 'Obscurity' suggests a condition, whereas 'forgotten' implies that the subject's status is defined by others. It can also imply either that they were overlooked or that they were once better known before lapsing into obscurity, which again conveys the fluidity of the category of obscure subjects. The word 'forgotten' conveys that the obscure subjects lie within the unconscious of the nation. The choice of 'forgotten' for the title of the essay emphasizes the reader's perspective. It becomes the responsibility of the reader to address these lives, rather than that of the lives to come to the attention of the nation.

When discussing biography in general and the lives of the obscure in particular, Stephen's emphasis is on a moment of contact between reader and subject. In an important passage of 'Forgotten Benefactors', he writes:

Instead of ascribing all good achievement to the hero who drops from heaven, or springs spontaneously from the earth, we should steadily remember that he is only possible, and his work can only be successfully secured, by the tacit co-operation of the innumerable unknown persons in whose hearts his words find an echo because they are already feeling after the same ideal which is in him more completely embodied (234).

The idea of detachment – of an act from its origin, of a man from his context, of men amongst themselves – is countered by an insistence upon connection and communication ('secured', 'co-operation', 'echo', 'embodied'). The idea of the responsive heart is strikingly Carlylean, as indeed is the passage as a whole. The idea of the great man's dependence upon the obscure is transmuted in the *DNB* as the whole nation's dependence upon its silent workers. It is worth noting that Stephen presents a very reassuring picture of the act of resurrecting hidden lives, where individuals co-operate rather than struggle. There is no suggestion that drawing

attention to the obscure might destabilise social boundaries, just as there is little suggestion that in having attention paid to them, the obscure will transcend their condition. The passage reasserts the importance of the 'great man' as much as it celebrates the hidden masses. The focus is heaviest on the responsiveness of those who contemplate this picture. The reader are asked once again not to discover, but to remember.

In his essays on biography, Leslie Stephen placed a large stress on the reader's reception of the *DNB* lives. The reader, we are told, must 'supply something for himself', and expand the fragments offered him 'by the help of his own imagination'.⁵¹⁴ He must complete the portrait by supplying 'the flesh and blood to his [the dictionary-maker's] dry bones'.⁵¹⁵ In the common language of resuscitation applied to biography, it is the reader here who brings the dead to life. The biographer's responsibility is to provide the 'concrete fact', the 'significant anecdote' that the reader then builds on. Stephen nevertheless allowed the biographer a more creative role when he notes that the biographer, and dictionary-maker, should 'set the little drama of human life in the right point of view'.⁵¹⁶ The word 'drama' echoes Carlyle's emphasis in *The Life of John Sterling*; the combination of an appeal to drama with the importance of the correct perspective suggests Eliot.

Stephen's position is in many ways a culmination of a century of discussions surrounding the role and representation of the obscure life. The ability to celebrate an 'obscure' life is beset with difficulties, from the relative paucity of sources to problems of proportion. Stephen brought a new element to the nineteenth-century representation of the 'obscure' by adding intellectuals to the ranks of the hidden – and doing so going back to Samuel Johnson's praise for 'the scholar who passed his life among his books' in the famous 1750 defence of 'obscure' biography. Stephen shared with other Victorian biographers a

⁵¹⁴ Stephen, 'National Biography', p. 63.

⁵¹⁵ Lee, 'Biography', p. 172.

⁵¹⁶ Stephen, 'Biography', p. 181 and 173.

conviction that biography was essentially harmonising genre that healed social tensions, and whose moral role went far beyond simple exemplarity by asking readers to connect emotionally with hidden workers who, once they had served their role as stimulants, could safely return to the shadows. On the one hand, the 'obscure' are associated with open-mindedness, nonconformity, eccentricity and randomness. They warn against the dangers of generalisation and point to the value that can be found in the small, the part, the unexpected. On the other hand, this fragmentary perspective is repeatedly pulled back to reveal a wider spectrum in which seemingly disjointed lives are bound together in a common national endeavour.

Conclusion

'The Lives of the Obscure': Virginia Woolf and the 'obscure'

It is appropriate to conclude with Virginia Woolf. Woolf gave such sustained critical and biographical attention to the idea of 'obscure lives' that earlier attempts to consider such lives have been overshadowed and the term 'obscure lives' is now most closely associated with her. Woolf's preoccupation with 'obscure lives' runs throughout her work. In her essay 'The Lives of the Obscure', published in three different versions between 1924 and 1925,⁵¹⁷ a librarian retrieves for the narrator volumes from a dusty Victorian library in which rows of biographies lie forgotten. The 'obscure' also appear in her essays, in short stories such as 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn' (1906), in her mock-biographies *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933), and in her novels. In 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' (1923), she 'is tormented by the suspicion that reverence for the dead is vitally connected with understanding of the living'.⁵¹⁸ Woolf spent much of her writing career untangling the notions of reverence and understanding, and exploring the relationship between past and present.

Woolf was unusual in the emphasis she laid on 'obscure' lives, even in the context of modernist biography. The 'new biographers' of the 1920s and 1930s – and in particular Lytton Strachey, André Maurois and Emil Ludwig – have been extensively discussed. Some biographers turned their attention to neglected or hidden subjects, such as Geoffrey Scott in

⁵¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'The Lives of the Obscure', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume IV* (London, 1994), pp. 118–45.

⁵¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, 'How It Strikes a Contemporary', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume III* (London, 1988), p. 354.

The Life of Zélide (1925), Strachey in his *Portraits in Miniature* (1931), or A. J. A. Symonds in *The Quest for Corvo* (1934). In these cases the biographers were more intrigued by their subject's eccentricities and character flaws than by the tension between fame and obscurity. One of the core impulses behind the 'new biography', however, was a rejection of what were deemed to be outmoded literary and moral values. It might seem surprising that, given the early twentieth-century determination to challenge Victorian hero-worship, there was not a wider resolve to celebrate minor lives instead. Yet 'new' and modern biographers were too preoccupied with dismantling old icons to set about immediately raising new ones. Virginia Woolf was a notable exception to this.

As Alison Booth writes in *Greatness Engendered*, 'Woolf participated in a modern revision of biography, altering the public, adultory emphasis of Victorian three-volume "lives".'⁵¹⁹ Woolf's ideas, however, grew out of the reflection on the representation of marginal or neglected lives that had developed throughout the nineteenth century. A comparison between Woolf's approach to the theme and that of her Victorian predecessors brings out the dialogue between them but also reveals what was unique to nineteenth-century biographies, and demonstrates that Leslie Stephen forms a stepping-stone between two periods in the history of biography.

The value of obscure lives

Woolf engaged directly with the creative possibilities that choosing 'obscure' biographical subjects could offer. She repeatedly connects obscurity with freedom, both creative and social. In 'The Lives of the Obscure', Woolf, like Leslie Stephen, celebrates the suggestive nature of 'obscure' lives. They are the raw material from which art is made, a vast 'workshop' or 'cauldron' (141). They are evanescent but stimulate Woolf to poetic reveries:

⁵¹⁹ Booth, *Greatness Engendered*, p. 109.

Gently, beautifully, like the clouds of a balmy evening, obscurity once more traverses the sky, an obscurity which is not empty but thick with the star dust of innumerable lives' (120).

Obscurity is not constructed as a negative but as a space of possibilities. In 'The Art of Biography' (1939) Woolf declared that 'the novelist is free; the biographer is tied'.⁵²⁰ Here, obscure lives disrupt this rule and are associated precisely with freedom: 'we can lie back and look up into the fine mist-like substance of countless lives, and pass unhindered from century to century, from life to life' (120).

Similarly, in *Orlando*, the eponymous hero(ine) is enraptured by the possibilities of obscurity:

The pith of his phrases was that while fame impedes and constricts, obscurity wraps about a man like a mist; obscurity is dark, ample, and free; obscurity lets the mind take its way unimpeded. [...] He may seek the truth and speak it; he alone is free; he alone is truthful; he alone is at peace'.⁵²¹

Obscurity enables one to transcend barriers of space and time. It leads Orlando to reflect on the 'obscure generations', 'obscure noblemen' and 'forgotten builders' who have built his house. The house has endured and perpetuated life, with its inhabitants 'working together with their spades and their needles, their love-making and their child-bearing'.⁵²² Obscurity conjures images of fertility and creation. Again, in the essay 'Street Haunting: a London Adventure' (1927), the narrator wanders into a second-hand bookshop, and expresses 'a hope, as we reach down some greyish-white book from an upper shelf, directed by its air of shabbiness and desertion, of meeting here with a man who set out on horseback over a hundred years ago [...]; an unknown traveller', or of making 'other such sudden capricious friendships with the unknown and the vanished'.⁵²³ The passage recalls Stephen's similar leafing through books, and the example he gives of a similar 'obscure' life in 'Biography':

⁵²⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', p. 150.

⁵²¹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London, 1933), pp. 96-7.

⁵²² Ibid, p. 98.

⁵²³ Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume IV*, p. 487.

‘Margaret Catchpole, a real heroine of romance, who stole a horse and rode 70 miles to visit her lover’.⁵²⁴ For both Stephen and Woolf, such encounters were powerfully suggestive.⁵²⁵

Victorian biographers also felt, albeit in a narrower manner, that obscurity offered certain freedoms. For subjects whom society was concerned with keeping under some form of control, such as women or working-class men, the biographer’s insistence that no fundamental social transgression had occurred made them appear safe. This in turn allowed writers to express ideas in less constrained terms than if their subject had lived in the public eye. The obscure life recorded in a biography was an ideal vehicle for observing society as it was in itself an image of the ‘in-between’. The ‘obscure’ moved in between the private and public spheres, between the amateur and the professional, the national and the foreign, the poor and the wealthy - even the sane and the insane. The ‘obscure’ could be defined as a negative, an absence, yet this emptiness provided a space on to which a national identity could be projected.

The very freedom provided by such subjects raises its own ethical and creative difficulties. In ‘The Lives of the Obscure’, Woolf encounters

one of the pitfalls of this nocturnal rambling among forgotten worthies. It is so difficult to keep, as we must with highly authenticated people, strictly to the facts. [...] Certain scenes have the fascination which belongs rather to the abundance of fiction than to the sobriety of fact (123).

As Carlyle stated and Samuel Smiles proved, ‘obscure’ subjects were more vulnerable to the whims of their biographer, since the public did not know enough about them to correct their versions. It is interesting that Woolf employs the terms ‘forgotten worthies’, Leslie Stephen’s favoured term, in connection with the problem of submitting ‘obscure’ subjects to facts – something that Stephen, as *DNB* editor, was compelled to do.

⁵²⁴ Stephen, ‘National Biography’, p. 64.

⁵²⁵ For Woolf, ‘obscurity’ gained further resonance through its recent association with psychology. In ‘The New Biography’, she reflects that a subject’s true life can be detected ‘in the inner life of thought and emotion which meanders darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul’, p. 473. The ‘obscure’ had become the site of investigations that some Victorian biographers had probed but never fully explored.

Woolf faces this 'pitfall' in the essay's final section on 'Miss Ormerod', where she bulks out the gaps within Ormerod's life-story into longer, richer episodes. Within a biography of Eleanor Ormerod published in 1904, Ormerod narrates her capture of a rare locust in sparse terms. The insect appeared amongst a crowd gathered at the George Hotel: 'Down the hill set off the locust, pursued by a party from the George, until it was captured at the bridge'.⁵²⁶ Woolf's amplified episode takes on Dickensian proportions, with the inhabitants of Chepstow pouring into the high road and running down the hill. A new character, the Pickwickian Samuel Budge, doctor, a 'highly respectable elderly gentleman who now came puffing upon the scene' (133), presents the treasure to the entomologist. Further inspired by 'suggestiveness', Woolf also repeatedly places words in Ormerod's mouth. As with so many of the Victorian biographies, the subject is more vulnerable to the emphasis that the biographer wishes to place on the life, as the public cannot act as a safeguard of accuracy. The life is the source of creativity, but it is difficult to conceive of a full-length biography founded on such principles.

Unlike Woolf, many Victorian biographers boldly did try to write more substantial biographies of their humble subjects, though they faced similar difficulties. Not all were successful, and many biographies show the strain of padding out a largely uneventful life. Often working from scant materials, they too were tempted to expand upon suggestive fragments or to rewrite their sources. Yet the daring and sophistication of some of these biographers should not be underestimated. To some extent, Victorian works demonstrated a more complex relationship between subject, biographer and reader than many of the experimental 'new biographies' that were often even less respectful of sources than nineteenth-century works. The Victorian habit of reproducing large chunks of autobiographical writing and short memoirs by friends and relatives was condemned, and

⁵²⁶ Robert Wallace, *Eleanor Ormerod, LL.D* (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 38.

rightly so, by the modernists as lacking in artistic flair. Letting the subject 'speak in his own words' was insisted upon, however, as something of the highest importance (though many biographers continued to meddle with their subject's own words). In early twentieth-century biographies, the biographer's voice clearly dominates, and the more obvious artistry tends to smooth over the intricacies of the lives. The reader of the patchwork Victorian biographies has the role of piecing together a portrait from the voice of the biographer, that of the subject, and that of friends or relatives. The result is often discordant despite the framing role of the biographer. As Smiles's biography of Thomas Edward most dramatically illustrates, the tensions between biographer and subject are often some of the most revealing aspects of the works.

In 'Street Haunting', Woolf further describes the appeal of 'obscure' lives by using the language of empathy in a way that Victorian biographers would have understood. Woolf joins the earlier biographers in suggesting that the eye which notices the obscure is 'sportive and generous; it creates; it adorns, it enhances' (485). The term 'generous' recalls Stephen's repetition of the word in 'Forgotten Benefactors'. The attentive eye is rewarded with the gift of empathy, and the freedom to transgress one's limited identity: 'Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way [...]. One could become a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer' (490). Where Woolf differs from the earlier biographers is in suggesting that these inquiries serve the artist more than the moralist. The declaration that the 'life which is fantastic cannot be altogether tragic' (484) is a writer's rather than a sociologist's or moralist's perspective. Visits to the underworld are stimulating for the artist in a manner that does not so obviously benefit the subject, whether alive or dead. Like Victorian biographers, the empathy produced is a temporary 'illusion' that produces 'delight and wonder' (490) and which benefits primarily the person experiencing it. Unlike them, Woolf acclaims the literary rather than moral advantages of empathy.

Nevertheless, Woolf addresses a common tenet of nineteenth-century biographical writing: that understanding the other developed the faculty of altruism and avoided morbid self-obsession. But she gives it a new twist. In 'Street Haunting', the rambler's encounter with other lives enables the narrator to escape from the self ('we shed the self') and become 'part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers' (481) in a manner that is both desirable and troubling. The political echoes of Woolf's phrase are in marked contrast to the manner in which Victorian biographers depicted the crowd, as they resisted any suggestion that their work had 'republican' echoes. On the contrary, biographers felt that the genre helped readers to 'shed the self' in order to quieten selfish desires and contribute in a more productive and harmonious way to society. Woolf's emphasis makes sense when one considers the more political and militant aspects of rescuing the forgotten, in ways that the Victorians avoided.

Woolf could not but wonder whether 'obscure' lives did, however, possess a clear value. Victorian biographers were generally confident in the worth of their endeavours to resuscitate 'obscure' lives, and appealed to the highest authorities – Johnson, Carlyle, Eliot, Ruskin – to remove possible doubts within themselves or their readers. The emphasis in so many prefaces that the biographical subject was of little interest was commonly followed by an insistence on the value of the uneventful. Only Leslie Stephen struggled with the idea of mediocrity in a manner that anticipates Woolf.

In her essays, Woolf often questions the merit of saving the mediocre, as in her review of E. V. Lucas's biography of Anne Seward, in which she asks 'why should Miss Seward need a biography'.⁵²⁷ In 'Lives of the Obscure', one of the roles of these forgotten individuals is simply to offer new perspectives on Great Lives. 'Little Miss Fend' meets a 'man with very bright eyes': William Blake. At the local inn, 'Mr. Charles Lamb has just left the room' (121).

⁵²⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'A Swan and Her Friends', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume I* (London, 1986), p. 151.

Woolf stressed this reading of the obscure as providers of valuable perspectives on the great in the introduction of the *London Mercury* and *Dial* versions of the essay. Such individuals, ‘in spite of their invincible mediocrity’, provide through their similarly mediocre memoirs ‘precisely that background, atmosphere, and standing of common earth which nourish people of greater importance’ (140). They are there to provide perspective and to prepare the way for greater talents. Biographies such as *Mothers of Great Men* (1859) and indeed Stephen’s ‘Forgotten Benefactors’ had previously explored this angle, and in recent years this has become a popular form of biography. The emphasis diminishes the importance of the ‘obscure’ on one hand by denying them individual value, whilst insisting that hidden influence is a valuable path of inquiry on the other.

Yet mediocre books and, by implication, lives, have a ‘more important office’ than that. In Carlylean language, Woolf describes them as ‘the dressing-rooms, the workshops, the wings, the sculleries, the bubbling cauldrons, where life seethes and steams and is for ever on the boil’ (141). The temptation to delve amongst this chaotic, life-giving scenery is coupled with the understanding that the energy of these life-givers is dependent on their remaining backstage. One can resource oneself through contact with them, but this contact should best be a temporary one. Again, Woolf’s stance here remains true to most Victorian works.

Woolf wavers between according such lives a serious role and considering them simply as charming. Charm is a value not to be underestimated. Foraging into the unknown is represented as a delightful dalliance. In the *London Mercury* and *Dial* versions of ‘The Lives of the Obscure’, the introduction ends with the exclamation in Leslie Stephen-like terms: ‘how delicious to ramble and explore!’ (141). The combative narrative of a reader strenuously rescuing the neglected from the ravages of time is set against the celebration of a more leisurely reading, which the disproportionate presence of entertainingly eccentric subjects accentuates. The overwhelming effect of the essay is of an old-fashioned cosiness, which at

first seems to smooth over the wider implications of unearthing buried existences. Yet Woolf was ambivalent about 'charm'. She was alert to the quaintness involved in such recuperations of the past in its more homely, everyday condition, and of the self-indulgence of the reader who is seduced by it.

'Charm' was a significant attraction for Victorian biographers of 'obscure' lives, and they were often not so shy of quaintness, frequently opening their biographies with length descriptions of pleasant scenery. William Jolly introduces his life of John Duncan with a scene providing 'pretty peeps for the painter', including a 'quaint dial';⁵²⁸ Rebecca Wakefield's life opens with a description of her 'romantic little town' with its 'shady lanes, quaint old stiles'.⁵²⁹ For E. V. Lucas, Bernard Barton's life is full of 'wholesome sweetness' and 'charm'.⁵³⁰ Leslie Stephen repeatedly celebrated the 'charming'. Such descriptions seem to minimise the potential impact of the lives. The biographers associated charm, however, with the picturesque, which in turn they linked with the reader's ability to engage imaginatively with the subject.

Obscurity and eccentricity

Though there have been countless famous men who were notoriously eccentric, both nineteenth-century biographers and Woolf drew a parallel between eccentrics, who lived on the margins, and the 'obscure'. In the essay 'The Eccentrics' (1919), Woolf writes that 'the Government offices are not for them, nor the Houses of Parliament, nor the Woolsack, nor the Judicial Bench'.⁵³¹ Full-length biographies of such individuals, Woolf states, have been written 'far too seldom'; these men and women tend to be relegated to a footnote in the life of 'some great dignitary', and become nameless through 'their long obscurity and fantastic

⁵²⁸ Jolly, *The Life of John Duncan*, p. 1.

⁵²⁹ Brewin, *Memoirs of Rebecca Wakefield*, p. 1.

⁵³⁰ Lucas, *Bernard Barton and His Friends*, p. 11.

⁵³¹ Virginia Woolf, 'The Eccentrics', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume III* (London, 1988), p. 38

behaviour'.⁵³² Woolf initially agrees with, before slightly diverging from, a Victorian analysis of eccentricity.

Many nineteenth-century biographers exploited only the anecdotal and lively potential of eccentric lives.⁵³³ In *On Liberty* (1869), however, John Stuart Mill drew attention to the social role of the eccentric:

Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage it contained.⁵³⁴

In Mill's analysis, eccentricity is a token of the freedom within the state that enables it to flourish, and a sign of the strong character and individuality of its inhabitants. 'Persons of genius', he argues, are 'more individual than any other people' and less able to fit inside ready-made social moulds. Cultivating individuality, of which eccentricity can be a manifestation, means that life becomes 'rich, diversified, and animating', making in turn 'the race infinitely better worth belonging to'.⁵³⁵ For the Victorian biographers, the eccentric, the marginal, and the obscure, provided a means of praising individuality in the face of opprobrium and addressing the moral failures of an epoch. The lives of Charlotte Tucker, Augusta Drane, John Duncan, Thomas Edward, John Clare and William Blake make similar connections. Eccentricity is closely tied to ideas of national vigour, in a manner that Leslie Stephen picked up in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Woolf concurs that 'the English language is naturally exuberant, and the English character full of humours and eccentricities'.⁵³⁶

⁵³² Ibid, p. 40.

⁵³³ See W. Russell, *Eccentric Personages* (London: John Maxwell and Company, 1864), 2 vols.

⁵³⁴ Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 120-1.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p. 116.

⁵³⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'The Novels of George Meredith', *The Common Reader: Second Series* (London, 1932).

Woolf's 'The Eccentrics' is a step in that direction, and a curiously discreet homage to Leslie Stephen's *DNB*. Woolf was by no means the first to associate eccentricity with authenticity and sincerity and to describe it as something that cannot 'be taken up late in life or practised successfully by the mere will to practise it. [...] The quality which marks all true eccentrics is that never for a moment do they believe themselves to be eccentric.'⁵³⁷ The suggestion that such a lack of self-consciousness is praiseworthy is a well-worn theme. The 'genuine' was an important value for the Victorians, and self-indulgence was disdained. Eccentricity was deemed to enable the celebration of individuality without threatening the idea of the community. In Woolf's essay, their obsessions and habits are similarly fanciful and harmless, such as 'Uncle John with his passion for the baptismal rite, or his Aunt – I forget her name – who knew for certain that the world is shaped like a star-fish'.⁵³⁸ At worst, they commit a 'nuisance', but never a crime.⁵³⁹

Virginia Woolf's response to eccentrics is characteristic of her approach to 'obscure' lives as a whole. Her initial reaction is to respond to the imaginative potential of the life and to recognise the fancifulness of a subject such as Lady Hester who 'kept her white horse perpetually in readiness for the Messiah in her stable'. The second reaction is to question the deeper value of such charming but seemingly superficial tales:

What whim is it that bids us go seeking them round the corners and just beneath the horizon of so many good books devoted to good men? Surely the world has been right in conferring biographies where biographies are due?⁵⁴⁰

As with reviewers of the *DNB*, Woolf is unsettled by questions of proportionality and hierarchies. Her third response and answer to the dilemma is to reconsider the worth of these lives. Woolf questions whether great lives, or 'the solid and the serviceable fulfil every need

⁵³⁷ Woolf, 'The Eccentrics', p. 38.

⁵³⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, p. 38.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the soul'.⁵⁴¹ The implication is that eccentric lives, like the obscure, have a different, though crucial, role to play.

Woolf breaks entirely from Victorian responses to the eccentrics when she considers female lives. She was aware of the suspicion of strong female characters. As Hermione Lee writes, 'to be considered eccentric – harmless, amusing – might be a protection against being thought mad. But to be called eccentric is also to be laughed at and marginalised, and possibly not to be read.'⁵⁴² Most of Woolf's examples of eccentrics are of women, as she repeatedly questions the relationship between eccentricity, marginality, and power. 'The Duke and Duchess of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne' (1911) provides such reflections, with its portrait of 'that eccentric Maid of Honour, Margaret Lucas':

The Duchess had what is called an active mind. It was a dangerous possession if you were a woman and a Duchess and lived in the time of Charles the Second. [...] The Society of the Restoration was as intolerant of eccentricity as the society of boys at a public school. The Duchess, with her folio volumes, her odd manner of dress and behaviour, was a laughing stock in London.⁵⁴³

The Duchess is above all socially isolated ('there was no one to listen to her', 'nobody listened to her'). There is a sense that eccentricity can simply be a dislocation between an individual and his time rather than a behaviour bordering on insanity ('she had the misfortune to live either too late or too soon'⁵⁴⁴). Such statements suggest that 'eccentricity' is a label that can be used as a tool of oppression, to subdue discordant voices. Victorian biographers were often frank about their subject's mediocrity and eccentricity, but used this frankness to maintain their subject within a particular social sphere. Perhaps the single most important difference between nineteenth-century and the biographical commemoration of 'obscure'

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, p. 41.

⁵⁴² Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 78.

⁵⁴³ Virginia Woolf, 'The Duke and Duchess of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume I* (London, 1986), p. 348.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 349.

lives instigated by Woolf is that Woolf uses the 'obscure' as a means of attacking social imbalances rather than as a means of healing them or smoothing them over.

Remembering the 'obscure'

Where Woolf differs strikingly from Victorian biographers of 'obscure' lives is in her analysis of marginality. Poverty and submission are not idealised or depicted as forces that can be surmounted by those with sufficient character and determination. The charming eccentrics form one category of Woolf's 'obscure'. The others are hidden lives, past and present, constrained by social circumstances: the 'maimed company of the halt and the blind', a 'bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten', an 'old woman flung abandoned on the step of a public building'.⁵⁴⁵ Woolf's language when alluding to them reinforces the tension between sight ('glaring', 'public building') and invisibility ('blind', 'abandoned'). They are overlooked by the public in a far more devastating way than Victorian biographers allowed. That Woolf was notoriously ambivalent regarding the lower classes and campaigns for democratization should not distract from the importance of her investigation into the 'obscure'.

Woolf is concerned with how individuals, but above all women, have been excluded from official discourses. In 'The Lives of the Obscure', her tone and perspective changes radically from that of her nineteenth-century predecessors when she discusses female lives. To uncover hidden female lives is, for Woolf, to uncover a narrative of oppression. The essay contains a striking catalogue of female misery. Strutt, 'a bit of a character', would 'not let his daughters eat meat, so no wonder they died of consumption' (119); 'Poor Fanny Hill' was 'forced to drudge for her husband's mistress, for Captain M. had wasted all her fortune, ruined all her life' (120), and Edgeworth's first wife, to whom he was 'a tyrant', could barely express her 'bewilderment, her loneliness, her despair' (123). Woolf often expressed

⁵⁴⁵ Woolf, 'Street Haunting', pp. 483-4.

uncertainty over whether anger is an appropriate response to tales of female oppression and condemned Charlotte Brontë for allowing 'indignation' to seep through into *Jane Eyre*.⁵⁴⁶ Yet there is an undeniably combative dimension to her declaration that 'if ever a woman wanted a champion, it is obviously Laetitia Pilkington' (127). It is in such passages that Woolf breaks with the Victorian treatment of 'obscure' lives.

Woolf's unrevised short story, 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn' (1906),⁵⁴⁷ was an early attempt at imagining a female biographer uncovering a hidden woman's life. The first section describes a social historian, Merridew, who desires to take hold of precious manuscripts, including a medieval woman's diary, of the value of which the owner seems barely aware. (Indeed, the story can be read as a reversal of James's 'The Aspern Papers'.) The initial project is described in terms that echo the historiographical essays of Macaulay and Carlyle:

I have not scrupled to devote several pages of large print to an attempt to show, vividly as in a picture, some scene from the life of the time; here I knock at the serf's door, and find him roasting rabbits he has poached; [...]. In another room I show you Dame Elinor, at work with her needle; and by her on a lower stool sits her daughter stitching too, but less assiduously.⁵⁴⁸

Yet Merridew (and Woolf) go beyond the nineteenth-century historians by suggesting that women's exclusion from history was the result of a far more deliberate process of suppression than lives of poor or forgotten men. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf imagines an old woman whose daily life has not been preserved, and comments that 'no biography or history has a word to say about it'. Equally distressing is the fact that the woman herself can only recall fragments of male battles or great men ('she would say that she remembered the streets lit for

⁵⁴⁶ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 110.

⁵⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (London, 1985).

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 34.

the battle of Balaclava, or had heard the guns fire in Hyde Park for the birth of King Edward the Seventh'). The woman has not learnt to think about her own history.⁵⁴⁹

Woolf tries to counter this history of exclusion by redefining exclusion in a more positive manner. In *Three Guineas*, she elaborates a discourse in which the obscure and anonymous take on the potentially powerful role of the 'outsider'. Marginality is initially associated with powerlessness: she has 'no right to speak' or speaks 'ignorantly as an outsider must'.⁵⁵⁰ Rapidly, however, this is reversed. Woolf proposes that the daughters of educated men create an 'Outsiders Society' that would work for 'liberty, equality and peace'.⁵⁵¹ The outsider is sufficiently distanced from society to be able to challenge it. Woolf offers women the chance to turn a situation of oppression to their advantage in a manner that anticipates Foucault's 'reverse discourse'. In 'Anon', invisibility contains similarly subversive potential: 'Anon had great privileges. He was not responsible. He was not self conscious. He is not self conscious. He can borrow. He can repeat. He can say what every one feels.'⁵⁵²

A number of Victorian biographers of women preceded Woolf in suggesting that being an 'outsider' might be liberating. In lives of missionaries, their departure from England provides an opportunity for the women to relish the freedoms suddenly conferred by being outside England. The lives of nuns are very much 'inside' rather than outside, yet the possibility of experiencing freedom through a removal to the margins of society is again implied. The same conclusion that women must remove themselves from common society in order to be fulfilled can be drawn, though Woolf's playful yet forthright propositions for women's role in society are absent.

⁵⁴⁹ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 133-4.

⁵⁵⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London, 1938), p. 57.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, p.193.

⁵⁵² Virginia Woolf, 'Anon' (unpublished), in Brenda R. Silver, ' "Anon" and "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Last Essays', *TCL*, 25 (Autumn-Winter 1979), p. 397.

The idea that life-writing could be used to provide women with a sense of their own identity and history, and as a part of a feminist project of recuperation was never expressed as explicitly by Victorian biographers (whether male or female) as by Woolf. Authors of collective biographies, which were canonical projects in themselves, were generally more confident in expressing the importance of building a separate, female history. Most female Victorian biographers were not concerned with recuperating hidden women's lives because they were only just beginning the process of celebrating famous women's lives. Attempts to collect female lives usually involved lives of writers or of royalty, such as Mrs. Elwood's *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England* (1843) or Anna Jameson's *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (1831). Virginia Woolf relied heavily on auto/biographical fragments written in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to dig up forgotten lives. Victorian biographers had little access to similar sources for earlier centuries, and archival research was anyhow in its infancy. The endeavour to discover and celebrate in biographies hidden lives, whether male or female, in the past had not yet begun and was still associated with a narrow antiquarian interest.

Most biographies of 'obscure' lives, whatever their gender, were of contemporaries or near-contemporaries. Women and men wrote lives of women in fairly equal numbers and with no startling difference in tone and bias. Most biographers avoided entering into an explicitly feminist debate. It is worth noting, however, that men are given a negligible part to play in biographies of women written in this period. This is partly because many of the subjects were not married, yet this absence of men also holds true for married subjects, whose husbands cut a poor figure (as in Frances Trollope's biography) or are simply pushed to one side (as in Rebecca Wakefield's). The lack of opposition means that the biographers lose an opportunity to reflect critically on women's limited opportunities. However, it also enables female subjects to be considered as independent from the lives of men. This act of isolation was in

itself rare. Biographers were aware of embarking on an unusual project in paying full-length tribute to an individual female subject; they rarely called for a collective endeavour to celebrate female lives.

Woolf expressed some doubts as to the effectiveness of biography as a tool to recuperate hidden lives, whether male or female. In 'The Lives of the Obscure' and 'Street Haunting' she depicts men and women who had already been commemorated in a biography, yet this did not prevent them from being forgotten. The biographies in the library and bookshop are dusty and neglected. In 'The Diary of Mistress Joan Martyn', Merridew's self-satisfied voice is abandoned at mid-point, and succeeded by Joan's own voice through her diary. This narrative division seems to beg the question of whether the intrusion of a contemporary voice and the intrusive biographer is a potential danger. Joan herself doubts the power of words ('there is nothing in the pale of my days that needs telling'⁵⁵³) and privileges oral history ('as my mother would say, the best stories are those that are told over the fire side; [...] it is certain that no written book can stand beside them'⁵⁵⁴). Biography appears as a third choice, behind direct communication and autobiographical writing. Woolf cannot altogether repress a partial assent to Carlyle's and Leslie Stephen's attractions to silence. (In 'Anon', she writes that 'it seems possible that the great English art may not be the art of words'.⁵⁵⁵) Yet the compelling nature of the diary seems to justify the efforts made to recover it in order to bring to light a rare female history. Woolf's attempts to trace not merely individual lives but a lineage of hidden histories offered a new direction for biographies of 'obscure' lives, which has been extensively picked up by more recent feminist biographers. Woolf, who famously wrote that 'a woman writing thinks back through her mothers',⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ Woolf, 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn', p. 61.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 62

⁵⁵⁵ Woolf, 'Anon', p. 338.

⁵⁵⁶ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 134-5.

draws attention to the value of building an alternative tradition of previously neglected female lives and insists that 'all these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded'.

In *A Room of One's Own* she wanders through the London streets 'feeling in imagination the pressure or dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life'.⁵⁵⁷ These lives include those of the

women at the street corners with their arms akimbo, and the rings embedded in their fat swollen fingers, talking with a gesticulation like the swing of Shakespeare's words; or from the violet-sellers and match-sellers and old crones stationed under doorways [...] All that you will have to explore, I said to Mary Carmichael, holding your torch firm in your hand.⁵⁵⁸

Woolf's examples combine an interest in both unrecorded female and unrecorded working-class lives, conveyed with earthy vibrancy. The allusion to Shakespeare hints that these women are in touch with something as old, English and national as the country's most famous dramatist, and prepares Woolf's evocation of Shakespeare's imaginary sister. The somewhat quaint image of 'violet-sellers and match-sellers', selling small objects which together evoke the useful and the pleasurable, gives the impression that these lives transcend a particular epoch, as do the 'old crones'. By choosing the image of the 'fat swollen fingers', Woolf counterbalances their 'charming' appeal with social resonance. The image of the torch underscores the darkness of the territory to be approached, whilst evoking the necessity of transmitting such endeavours to future generations. They are of national import.

Woolf was certainly not the first to make such connections between Englishness and the neglected: Leslie Stephen did, and Frederick Martin, for example, makes similar parallels in *The Life of John Clare*. In 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn', the solid, ancient country house in which Joan lived enables its current male inhabitant to consider 'all generations [...] bathed in his mind in the same clear and equable light'.⁵⁵⁹ The obscure are considered as the

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 135.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Woolf, 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn', p. 43.

foundations of the nation. Whereas Clare and biographers such as Gilchrist and Milnes argue that paying one's respect to the neglected works towards the good of the nation, Woolf suggests that exploring these lives would benefit women. Woolf did at times think in national terms, but with a feminist angle. In 'The Intellectual Status of Women', she argues that 'the seventeenth century produced more remarkable women than [sic] the sixteenth, the eighteenth more than the seventeenth, and the nineteenth more than all three put together'.⁵⁶⁰ The phrase is almost identical to Sidney Lee's similar statement in his 'Statistical Account' with the single, crucial, difference of gender. There is an uncertainty in Woolf's works as to whether feminist history should be written in a manner radically different from male history, or whether it could follow similar patterns.

Victorian biographers tended to praise the individual subject but consider their impact on the community. The social benefits of altruism more than personal fulfilment was their goal. Woolf, in contrast, frequently begins her reflection with the group but moves towards a consideration of individual actions and their impact. For Woolf, 'the experience of the mass is behind the single voice': George Eliot should have paid homage to 'Eliza Carter – the valiant old woman who tied a bell to her bedstead in order that she might wake early and learn Greek'.⁵⁶¹ Woolf makes a direct link between the relatively obscure, somewhat eccentric female subject and the later, 'Great' woman. Thomas Carlyle, James Fitzjames Stephen and Leslie Stephen also argued that obscure men (and some women) prepared the way for Great men. Woolf, however, places the accent on the achievement rather than national potential. Her depiction of Eliza Carter uses the type of anecdote favoured by Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help*, yet she does not follow up with a Smilesian analysis of national health.

⁵⁶⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'The Intellectual Status of Women', *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. Michelle Barrett (London, 1979), pp. 55-56.

⁵⁶¹ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 98.

The idea of hidden influences was given one of its most powerful expressions at the conclusion of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Virginia Woolf offered a slight revision of the passage in *A Room of One's Own*. Eliot wrote of her heroine Dorothea Brooke that

The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.⁵⁶²

Woolf takes a slightly different slant, and considers Shakespeare's imaginary sister:

Drawing her life from the life of the unknown who were her forerunners, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while.⁵⁶³

Woolf comes exceedingly close here to the insistence of countless Victorian biographers that work in 'poverty and obscurity' was worthwhile. The phrase even echoes attempts by biographers of women and working-class men to deny the possibility of social mobility by painting the attractions of obscurity. However, where Eliot uses the passive word 'rest' to describe the obscure, Woolf's depiction stresses action ('effort', 'determination', 'work'). Eliot does suggest a narrative of gradual progress ('growing good') yet emphasises the present and how it was constructed on past efforts in a manner that reflects most nineteenth-century biographies of the 'obscure'. Woolf picks up from this point and looks towards the future and places the reader amongst the obscure themselves and faces them with their own responsibilities. There is a strain in her essays on bringing about change that is absent from most Victorian biographies.

The emotional, passing graveside tribute that Eliot and Victorian biographers of 'obscure' lives requested of their readers is very different from the place Woolf assigns to Shakespeare's imaginary sister and the other unfulfilled female lives she represents.

⁵⁶² Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 825.

⁵⁶³ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 172.

Nineteenth-century biographers were clear that they did not expect nor want their initially 'obscure' and apparently mediocre subjects to achieve fame through their endeavours. Sudden fame suggested a form of social disruption that appeared highly distasteful to them. The encounter between the subject and reader is a temporary one. The function of the 'obscure' subject was to stimulate an emotion within the reader: empathy, which in turn developed the faculty of altruism, but also an emotional acknowledgement of the thousands of individual contributions that built communities and, beyond that, the nation itself. With the exception of certain writers, the biographers did not focus on the future status of their subject.

Woolf's recurrent use of the word 'record' to describe her biographical endeavours reveals an entirely different stance, which has more in common with later twentieth-century attempts to champion 'obscure' lives. The accent is no longer on a transient contemplation but on remembering and recording elusive lives. In *Flush*, a footnote pauses to dwell on the Barrett's servant 'Wilson':

The life of Lily Wilson is extremely obscure and cries aloud for the services of a biographer. [...] she was typical of the great army of her kind – the inscrutable, the all-but-silent, the all-but-invisible servant maids of history.⁵⁶⁴

The language is Carlylean. Carlyle, however, praised these silent individuals (mostly men) but also silence itself ('Silence, the great Empire of Silence: [...] It alone is great; all else is small'⁵⁶⁵). Woolf wishes, in contrast, to break such silences, as the word 'cries' implies. Women, she implies, are the first casualties of the silences imposed by male historians.

In 'The Lives of the Obscure', the subjects are not Jamesian ghosts seeking to ward off prying eyes, as in 'The Real Right Thing' (1899), but ghosts who desire human contact and who are tantalized by the possibility of being brought back to life. They are 'all taut and pale in their determination never to be forgotten, men who have just missed fame, men who have passionately desired redress' (121). This desire for remembrance offers a strong contrast

⁵⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (New York, 1928), p. 229.

⁵⁶⁵ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 192.

with Victorian biographies in which the reader is assured that the subject cared nothing for fame. Woolf would alter, rather than originate, the biographical representation of 'obscure' lives by placing a new accent on the value of remembrance rather than an acceptance of neglect.

* * *

Biography underwent some profound changes during the nineteenth century and the significant number of biographies commemorating 'obscure' lives was one of its most important developments. Two poems, one composed before the Victorian period yet at a time when the foundations were being laid for biographies of 'obscure' lives, and another written four years before Lytton Strachey sounded the death knoll of Victorian biography, provide a glimpse of the distance biographies of 'obscure' lives had travelled. Both were reactions to the generous inclusion policies of biographical dictionaries. In 1782, William Cowper wrote the following:⁵⁶⁶

On Observing Some Names of Little Note

Recorded in the *Biographia Britannica*

Oh, fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
In vain recorded in historic page,
They court the notice of a future age:
Those twinkling tiny lustres of the land
Drop one by one from Fame's neglecting hand;
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.

So when a child, as playful children use,
Has burnt to tinder a stale last year's news,
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire—
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire,
There goes the parson, oh illustrious spark!
And there, scarce less illustrious, goes the clerk!

⁵⁶⁶ William Cowper, 'On Observing Some Names of Little Note Recorded in the *Biographia Britannica*', *The Poems of William Cowper, Volume I: 1748-1782* (Oxford, 1980), p. 409.

Here is Henry Newbolt, over a century later.⁵⁶⁷

‘Minora Sidera’

(The Dictionary of National Biography)

Sitting at times over a hearth that burns
 With dull domestic glow,
 My thought, leaving the book, gratefully turns
 To you who planned it so.

Not of the great only you deigned to tell –
 The stars by which we steer –
 But lights out of the night that flashed, and fell
 To-night again, are here.

Such as were those, dogs of an elder day,
 Who sacked the golden ports,
 And those later who dared grapple their prey
 Beneath the harbour forts:

Some with flag at the fore, sweeping the world
 To find an equal fight,
 And some who joined war to their trade, and hurled
 Ships of the line in flight.

Whether their fame centuries long should ring
 They cared not over-much,
 But cared greatly to serve God and the king,
 And keep the Nelson touch;

And fought to build Britain above the tide
 Of wars and windy fate;
 And passed content leaving to us the pride
 Of lives obscurely great.

1912.

Cowper considers the dictionary’s attempts to immortalize ‘names ignoble’ as doomed to failure. The dictionary-makers have been seduced by the charm of such lives: their motivation is fondness rather than a critical assessment of the subjects’ worth. The poet underscores the fruitlessness of the endeavour by following a solemn stanza by a light and

⁵⁶⁷ Henry Newbolt, ‘Minora Sidera’, *Poems: New and Old* (London, 1912), pp. 48-9.

playful one. Classical echoes (the river Lethe) and grand appeals to a 'historic page' and 'future age' are undermined by the nursery-like tones of the second stanza ('There goes my lady, and there goes the squire'). The play on the word 'illustrious' cruelly diminishes the importance of the unnamed parson and clerk.

Newbolt displays no such irony. The later poet also uses the imagery of the domestic fireside, only here fire has a creative rather than a destructive potential. (Though the poem is angled towards masculine lives, the image suggests the beneficial influence of women in the terms used by Leslie Stephen.) Newbolt's tones become more rather than less ceremonial. As with many Victorian biographers, the poet envisages the equal though very different value of great and 'obscure' lives. The stress on the subjects' lack of concern with fame and the emphasis on contentment echo the reassurances of numerous biographers that no social transgression was being advocated (they 'cared not over-much' for future fame).

Three elements in particular illustrate the expanse between the earlier and later poems, and the particularities of the Victorian concern with obscurity. The patriotic overtone was absent from the earlier verse but plays a central role here, just as the biographers were centrally concerned with both demonstrating and promoting the health and wealth of the nation. The notion that the attention given to neglected individuals in biographies was only a transient one and that immortality was not claimed for the subjects is also a new element. Finally, the poet places the real importance of these lives on the emotions they generate in the reader – here, pride and patriotism – in a manner that was unique to Victorian biographers.

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The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2924 (November 10, 1883): 600-1.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2925 (November 17, 1883): 635-6.

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The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2944 (March 29, 1884): 407-8.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2945 (April 5, 1884): 442-3.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2946 (April 12, 1884): 472-3.

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen. Volume I,’ *Mind*, vol. 10 (1885): 298.

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen – Vol. I’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2985 (January 10, 1885): 43-4.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3028 (November 7, 1885): 604-5.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3029 (November 14, 1885): 636-7.

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen – Vol. II’, *Athenaeum*, no. 2999 (April 18, 1885): 497-8.

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen. – Vol. III’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3012 (July 18, 1885): 73-4.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3028 (November 7, 1885): 604-605.

The ‘Dictionary of National Biography’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3029 (November 14, 1885): 636-637.

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen. – Vols. V. and VI.’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3052 (April 24, 1886): 545-6.

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‘The Old Saloon’, *Blackwood’s*, vol. 141 (February 1887): 310-3.

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'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen – Vols. IX. and X.,' *Athenaeum*, no. 3111 (June 11, 1887): 762-3.

'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen - Vols. XI., XII., and XIII.,' *Athenaeum*, no. 3146 (February 11, 1888): 172-3.

'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen – Vols. XIV.-XVIII', *Athenaeum*, no. 3208 (April 20, 1889): 499-501.

'The Literature and Language of the Age. ART II.', *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 169, no. 346 (April 1889): 328-50.

'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Vols. XIX-XXI, edited by Leslie Stephen. Vols. XXII and XXIII., edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee', *Athenaeum*, no. 3275 (August 2, 1890): 151-2.

'The Dictionary of National Biography. Edited by Leslie Stephen and S. L. Lee. Vols. I-XXII', *English Historical Review*, 5 (October 1890): 783-8.

'English Literature in 1890', *JSSL*, 54 (March 1891), pp. 158-60.

'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. – Vols. XXIV-XXVI', *Athenaeum*, no. 3314 (May 2, 1891): 564-5.

'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee – Vols. XXIV-XXVI', *Athenaeum*, no. 3316 (May 16, 1891): 628-9.

'Recent biography', *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 69 (1892): 835-843.

'*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Sidney Lee – Vols. XXVII-XXXI', *Athenaeum*, no. 3380 (August 6, 1892): 182-4.

'Boase's Modern English Biography', *Academy*, no. 1081 (January 21, 1893): 57.

'Anti-slavery history and biography', *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 72, no. 429 (July, 1893): 268-277.

'*Lewis Morrison-Grant: His Life, Letters, and Last Poems*, edited by Jessie Annie Anderson', *Academy* vol. 47, no. 1183 (January 5, 1895): 11

'Mr. Sidney Lee's Life of Shakespeare. *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Vol LI', *Academy*, 52 (July 10, 1897): 23.

'The National Dictionary of Biography': A Talk With Mr. Sidney Lee', *Academy*, no. 1315 (July 17, 1897): 50.

'A new theory of biography', *The Dial*, vol. 24, no. 285 (May 1, 1898): 281-283.

[Untitled], *Academy*, no. 1470 (July 7, 1900): 4

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Sidney Lee – Vol. LXIII’, *Athenaeum*, no. 3794, *Athenaeum* (July 14, 1900): 45-6.

‘The Dictionary of National Biography’, *Academy*, no. 1478 (1 September 1900): 178.

‘English Literature in 1900’, *JSSL*, 64 (March 1901): 138-40.

‘*Dictionary of National Biography*. Edited by Sidney Lee - *Supplement*’, no. 3862, *Athenaeum* (Nov 2, 1901): 588.

Appendix

Descriptive Catalogue

The following descriptive catalogue provides a short account of each biography, published between 1830 and 1901, consulted for this thesis. The works have been listed chronologically, rather than thematically, for two reasons. Many of the subjects belong to more than one category (John Clare, for example, is both a 'poet' and a 'working-class' subject). Moreover, a chronological listing complements the broadly thematic structure of the thesis and offers a parallel history of the evolution of biography in the nineteenth century. The exception to the date span of 1830-1901 is Leslie Stephen's *George Eliot*, published in 1902, which has been included as it forms part of the biographical writings of a Victorian biographer, but also since it offers insights into the representation of George Eliot, of whom two other Victorian biographies are included here.

Though the majority of the biographies catalogued below belong to the categories discussed in the thesis – women, working-class men, and writers – the range of subjects goes beyond these limits. This is partly because other categories of works had to be consulted in order for certain conclusions regarding the nature of biography during the period and the popularity of certain biographical subjects to be reached. Therefore, the catalogue includes a small number of biographies commemorating, for example, historical figures.

The catalogue makes no claim to being in any way comprehensive. Thousands of biographies were published between 1830 and 1901 and to survey them all would constitute a monumental task beyond the reach of this project. The biographies consulted were chosen from publishers' catalogues, short bibliographies and from connections suggested by individual works themselves. Certain categories of subjects have been omitted (such as criminals), as have significant works of biography (such as examples of the 'English Statesmen' series). Nevertheless, the catalogue encompasses some of the 'great works' of nineteenth-century biography together with lesser-known examples, some of the most innovative works, and some of the most controversial, and therefore offers a sound, albeit necessarily limited, history of Victorian biography.

Whenever possible, the first edition has been consulted for each work. Each entry is organised as follows:

- i. in bold, the full title of the biographer as given by the title page, and the number of volumes where this is more than one.
- ii. the number of pages in the work. For biographies commemorating a single subject, the entry states if a portrait of the subject is included. Later editions of the work are noted. It has not always been possible to trace all the editions of a work, notably as many were distributed as tracts. Where possible, the entry notes if a later edition advertises itself as the *nth* edition.
- iii. the subject's full name, dates, occupation and a short biographical sketch. For 'canonical' subjects, the sketch is far shorter than for more obscure individuals, for whom

information is harder to find. Where the work is a collective biography, the names of the subjects have been listed if the work dwells on forty or less lives. For biographies dealing with a larger number of individuals, the type of subject discussed has been noted.

iv. the biographer's full name, dates, occupation and a short biographical sketch. For 'canonical' writers, the sketch is again far shorter than for more obscure individuals.

v. a short description of the work. The description varies according to each entry, but might include noteworthy circumstances surrounding the publication of the work, the manner in which the work is either representation of, or, conversely, particularly unusual for, its time, the dominant theme and ideas that the biographer has sought to emphasise, or the particularities of his, or her, style.

1.

Moore, Thomas, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of His Life* (London: John Murray, 1830), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 670pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: 823pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted 1831, 1832, 1833, 1835, 1838, 1844, 1851, 1860, 1866, 1874, 1875, 1892, 1920 and 1932.

George Gordon Byron, sixth baron (1788-1824): poet. Byron was the controversial and famous author of, amongst other works, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), *Childe Harold* (1812-18), *The Corsair* (1813) and *Don Juan* (1819-20).

Thomas Moore (1779-1852): poet and biographer. Moore, who was born an Irish Catholic, found early success with his volume of poems and songs, *Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little* (1801). He combined extensive travelling with the publication of further volumes of poems and satires, and experienced phenomenal success with the oriental romance *Lalla Rookh* (1817). Moore received a large sum to write the biography of his friend Byron, who had handed Moore his manuscripts. Moore nevertheless became entangled in debates over copyright and the contents of the work, and Byron's memoirs were burnt in his presence. Moore's other biographical works include a life of Richard Sheridan, published in 1825 and a biography of Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1831). He also published a history of Ireland (1835-46).

Thomas Moore was paid 4,000 guineas by John Murray for the biography. Though Byron's memoirs had been burnt, Moore knew of their contents, and gained further insight into his friend from the numerous anecdotes and letters he received, which make for a lively and informative biography. Nevertheless, the work is a highly censored account, in which Moore blots out names, certain place names and even certain words, with asterisks. Moore also includes more general reflections on the nature of the poet. The biographer's use of letters increases as the work progresses, and the extent of his own commentary diminishes.

2.

Craik, G. L., *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties, Illustrated by Anecdotes* (London: Charles Knight, 1830-1), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: viii + 419pp. Volume 2: vi + 403pp. Reprinted in 1844, 1845, 1858, 1860, 1865, 1881, and 1906.

Collective biography: short biographies of over fifty, principally famous, men, such as Isaac Newton, John Milton and Benjamin Franklin.

George Lillie Craik (1798-1866): didactic writer. Craik, the son of a schoolmaster, was born in Scotland. He initially set out for a career in the church but instead moved to London and began to write extensively for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful

Knowledge, the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and the publisher Charles Knight. He moved in a literary circle that included Leigh Hunt, John Forster and Thomas Carlyle. Craik was appointed Professor of English Literature and History at Belfast in 1849. His other publications include numerous histories of English history and culture such as *Outlines of the History of the English Language* (1851) and a *Manual of English Literature* (1862).

The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties is one of the key works of 'self-help' literature, and was an important inspiration for Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859 – see below). The subjects are grouped according to themes: some bring out the difficulties overcome by the subjects (such as blindness or poverty) whereas others emphasize the subject's occupation (there are lives of soldiers, merchants and booksellers, for example). The didactic potential of these lives is repeatedly stressed. As with Smiles's later work, Craik is less concerned with advocating social advancement than values such as perseverance and hard work. A companion volume, illustrated by female examples, appeared in 1847 (see below), though it was less popular. The work, which sold extremely well, became an important cultural reference, and is mentioned, for example, in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7).

3.

Everett, James, *The village blacksmith, or, piety and usefulness exemplified in a memoir of the life of Samuel Hick, late of Micklefield, Yorkshire* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1831).

257pp. Reprinted in 1831, 1834, 1835, 1837, 1845. An 1879 edition is advertised as the eighteenth edition.

Samuel Hick (1758-1829): blacksmith and preacher. Hick was a humble blacksmith who gained some local notoriety in Micklefield as a Wesleyan preacher. Hick left his apprenticeship after his master's daughter formed an undesirable attachment to him. He developed strong ties with the local Wesleyan Methodists, began lecturing and was successful in raising funds for the circuit. He also carried out philanthropic work. Hick's preaching led him to travel throughout the country, including to London and throughout Yorkshire.

James Everett (1784-1872): Wesleyan minister. Everett was born in Northumberland. He began to serve an apprenticeship to a flax dresser and grocer before his conversion in 1803. He became a local preacher, and a Wesleyan minister in 1811. After his retirement, Everett held a bookshop in Manchester. James Everett was identified as the most likely candidate of the 1840s 'Fly Sheet' pamphlets that attacked the leadership and organisation of the Wesleyans and caused a national controversy. Everett denied the accusations along with fellow accused, but was expelled by the Conference. The affair prompted the decline of the Wesleyan Church. Everett published a biography of another humble preacher, William Crister, in 1835 (see below). He also wrote a three-volume biography of Adam Clarke (1843), and numerous memoirs, of varying length, of Wesleyans.

The work is one of the most sophisticated early nineteenth-century religious biographies, and of Wesleyan biographies in particular, despite the frequently abstract language and the excessive use of quotation. Everett was intrigued by contemporary biographical conventions and was interested in remoulding them. Samuel Hick placed the materials for a biography of his life into the hands of Everett, who made some significant changes and delayed the publication until after Hick's death. Some of the more interesting passages of the work are concerned with the fears of Hick and other local men regarding a possible invasion of England by Napoleon Buonaparte. Later editions of the biography display the biographer's vigorous defence from accusations made against his work in anti-Wesleyan periodicals. Everett frequently interrupts his narrative with footnotes that display

his own taste for religious controversy. The biography is prefaced by Longfellow's poem 'The Village Blacksmith'.

4.

Southey, Robert, *Attempts in Verse, by John Jones: An old servant, with some account of the writer, written by himself: And an Introductory Essay on the Lives and Works of Our Uneducated Poets* (London: John Murray, 1831).

332pp. Reprinted in 1836 and 1925.

Collective biography: John Taylor, Stephen Duck, James Woodhouse, John Bennet, Ann Yearsley, John Frederick Bryant and John Jones.

Robert Southey (1774-1843): poet and biographer. Southey grew to fame as one of the 'Lake poets', before becoming Poet Laureate in 1813. Though primarily known as a poet, he also wrote extensively for the *Quarterly Review*. His *Life of Nelson* (1813) was widely considered by nineteenth-century critics one of the finest examples of British biography. Other biographies published by Southey include a *Life of Wesley* (1818), a *Life of Cowper* (1833) and *Lives of the British Admirals* (1833).

The work combines literary history, criticism and biography. It is introduced by a letter from the servant John Jones, who sent the Poet Laureate samples of his work. Southey analyses the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fashion for uneducated poets. He does not encourage the use of poetry as a means of social advancement but praises humility in these subjects, and condemns those poets who challenged their patrons. Mediocre poetry is deemed to have its use as a tool of social harmony and contentment. Southey argues that the tradition of uneducated poets has reached an end due to the changing nature of the reading public. The work was published by subscription.

5.

[Anonymous], *Sketches of obscure poets, with specimens of their writings* (London: Cochran and McCrone, 1833).

208pp.

Collective biography: William Isaac Roberts, Robert Millhouse, Edward Rushton, Joseph Holland, John Mitford, Charles Crocker, Robert Tannahill, Michael Bruce, James Brown, Robert Franklin, Robert Story, William Hall, Christian Milne and William Hutton.

The author of this work has not been identified.

The work displays similarities with Robert Southey's earlier *Attempts in Verse...* (1831 – see above). It is, however, overall a less sophisticated work. There is little discussion of the poems: selections are simply printed after the sketches. The biographer is particularly interested in the nature of the poet and draws on Romantic ideas to depict the poet's exceptionally vivid emotions and his alienation from society. This representation is combined with a more Victorian notion of productivity and self-help. The biographer places a strong emphasis on the local rather than national importance of the poets.

6.

[Anonymous], *Noble Deeds of Woman, or example of female courage and virtue* (London: Henry Bohn, 1835).

vi + 367pp. Reprinted in 1835.

Collective biography: over a hundred women are included, ranging from the famous (Queen Elizabeth) to the unknown ('the miller's maid').

Elizabeth Starling (n.d.). This appears to be Starling's only publication.

The biographer calls on women to fulfil duties appropriate for their sphere. The preface laments that women too frequently betray their incapacity to fulfil domestic duties. The biographical sketches and anecdotes are grouped by values that women should aspire to embody: maternal affection, filial affection, sisterly affection, conjugal affection, humanity, integrity, benevolence, fortitude, courage and presence of mind, hospitality, self-control, gratitude, loyalty, eloquence and patriotism. There is also a final and somewhat incongruous section on female contribution to science. The patriotic dimension of the work is important: Starling encourages above all the union of domestic and social duties with the 'sublime virtue of patriotism'. There are no full biographical accounts of these women, but simply anecdotes illustrating certain virtues. Sub-sections are introduced by quotations from poets and dramatists.

7.

Everett, James, *The Wall's End Miner; or, a Brief Memoir of the life of William Crister, Including An Account of the Catastrophe of June 18th, 1835* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1835).

xi + 168pp. Reprinted in 1838 and 1850.

William Crister (1779-1835): miner and preacher. Crister was a miner from Northumberland, the son of a brass-maker and the youngest of six children. He worked in the local pit from the age of seven, and narrowly escaped a mining accident in his youth. Crister lived a largely irreligious life until his conversion in 1809 during a Methodist class. He began to lead a charitable and religious life, studied the Scriptures in detail and participated in the lecturing circuit. Crister lost his life in a mining accident that killed 103 men.

James Everett (1784-1872): Wesleyan minister. Everett was born in Northumberland. He began to serve an apprenticeship to a flax dresser and grocer before his conversion in 1803. He served as a local preacher, and became a Wesleyan minister in 1811. After his retirement, he held a bookshop in Manchester. James Everett was identified as the most likely candidate of the 1840s 'Fly Sheet' pamphlets that attacked the leadership and organisation of the Wesleyans and caused a national controversy. Everett denied the accusations along with fellow accused, and was expelled by the Conference. The affair prompted the decline of the Wesleyan Church. Everett published a biography of another humble preacher, Samuel Hick, in 1831 (see above). He also wrote, a three-volume biography of Adam Clarke (1843), and numerous memoirs of varying length of Wesleyans.

The biography begins with a defence of religious biography as a genre with its own rules and conventions, which serves in part to justify the abundant use of Scriptural quotations in the work. As with Everett's other biographies, the work is competently produced. The uniqueness and principal interest of the biography lie in the second half of the work when Everett describes in detail the events surrounding the explosion in the Wall's End Colliery that occurred on the 18th June 1835 and led to the loss of 103 lives. The account is a striking social document.

8.

Bulmer, Agnes, *Mrs. Elizabeth Mortimer, with Selections from her Correspondence* (London: John Mason, 1836).

viii + 372 pp. Portrait of the subject.

Elizabeth Mortimer [*née* Richie] (1754-1835): biographer. Mortimer was born in Yorkshire, the daughter of a naval surgeon. The family were Wesleyan Methodists and closely acquainted with John Wesley. Mortimer herself wavered in her allegiance to the Wesleyans, but she eventually became a class leader, in 1784, at Otley, and began to preach.

Elizabeth kept a wide correspondence with prominent Methodists of the period. From 1790 she became the housekeeper of Hester Ann Rogers in London and nursed Wesley on his deathbed. She married Harvey Walklate Mortimer (1753-1819) in 1801, having rejected him in 1786.

Agnes Bulmer [*née* Collinson]: poet and writer. Bulmer was an autodidact and passionate learner. A very religious woman, she was a member of the Methodist society and became a member of the City Road society in 1793, the same year in which she married Joseph Bulmer. Agnes Bulmer published a twelve-book religious poem titled *Messiah's Kingdom* (1833) and histories from the Scriptures (1837-8).

The work is a representative example of early Victorian religious biography. Bulmer celebrates the genre of Christian biography in the preface and believes in its moral influence. An opposition is made between event-filled biographies and biographies that represent 'ordinary life'. For Bulmer, this does not refer only to hidden lives but also to the life of the intellect and the religious life. The biographer is keen to stress that the subject shied from publicity of any kind. As was common with Christian life-writing, the biography makes extensive use of the subject's diary extracts and letters linked by short comments by Bulmer.

9.

Collinson, Anne Ross, *Memoir of Mrs. Agnes Bulmer, Author of "Messiah's Kingdom," and of the "Memoirs of Mrs. Mortimer," &c. By her sister* (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1837).

v + 182pp.

Agnes Bulmer [*née* Collinson] (1775-1836): poet and writer. Bulmer was an autodidact and passionate learner. A very religious woman, she was a member of the Methodist society and became a member of the City Road society in 1793, the same year in which she married Joseph Bulmer. Agnes Bulmer published a twelve-book religious poem titled *Messiah's Kingdom* (1833), histories from the Scriptures (1837-8) and a biography of Elizabeth Mortimer (1836 – see above).

Anne Ross Collinson (n.d.). Collinson was the subject's sister and, unlike her, was not a professional writer. This biography appears to have been her only published work.

This biography is representative of much early nineteenth-century religious biography, where quotations from the subject's diary and letters form the bulk of the narrative, with very few contributions by the biographer. It is also the life of a female writer, and Collinson includes a number of Bulmer's poems, though she points out that these are 'minor', and the emphasis is clearly on the subject's religious life.

10.

Jameson, Mrs, *The Romance of Biography; or, Memoirs of Women Loved and Celebrated by Poets, from the Days of the Troubadours to the Present Age; a series of anecdotes intended to illustrate the influence which female beauty and virtue have exercised over the characters and writings of men of genius* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), 2 vols. Third edition.

349pp + 363pp.

Collective biography: the work gathers a wide range of subjects, from the loves of the classic poets to those of Voltaire.

Anna Brownell Jameson [*née* Murphy] (1794-1860): writer and historian. Jameson was born in Dublin and moved to England in 1798, where she worked for some time as a governess. She became acquainted with a large literary and intellectual circle through her (unsuccessful) marriage with the lawyer Robert Sympson Jameson (1796-1854), and

frequented the Brownings and the Carlyles amongst others. Jameson's published works included works of art history, criticism, biography, theology, travel and essays. She had an interest in women's education and campaigned for women's rights. She is known mainly for her *Characteristics of Women* (1832), an overview and analysis of Shakespeare's heroines.

The work is presented to the reader as a series of unpretending sketches, which combine anecdotes, some analysis, and picturesque touches. Women's influence over great men is celebrated, and their immortalisation through verse is valued as giving a glimpse of female lives which would otherwise have passed into obscurity. The work concludes with an appreciation of contemporary, less idealised or simplistic poetic representations of women. Jameson encourages women to regard such literary consecrations of their gender with a cautious and analytical eye.

11.

West, Francis Athon, *Memoirs of Mrs. Jane Gibson of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, including selections from her correspondence* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1837).

viii + 351pp. Portrait of the subject.

Jane Gibson (1797-1835): religious woman. Gibson lived in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, carried out a large correspondence with local Methodist worthies, and lived a calm and pious life.

Francis Athon West (1801-69): Methodist minister. West was a Wesleyan who produced another short biographical memoir, of one 'F. A. W.' (1873) and a small number of religious writings and sermons, including a reflection on *The Duty of British Christians in reference to Colonial Slavery* (1830).

The biographer sets out to define two types of biography: biographies concerned with 'great characters' and biographies of private life. The lives of women seem particularly suitable to him for the second branch, notably as they have a greater didactic value because imitation seems more practicable. West stresses that lives of women moving in 'comparatively private life' furnish 'little incident', and emphasizes that the subject would have shrunk from public notice. West states that he only expects the work to be circulated amongst the subject's friends and family. The work itself is representative of many religious biographies, with a heavy use of quotations and extracts from letters and diaries.

12.

Lockhart, John Gibson, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart* (London: John Murray and Whittaker and Co., 1837-8), 7 vols.

Vol. 1: v + 418pp. Portrait of the subject. Published in 1837. Concerns the years 1771-1804. Volume 2: iii + 407pp. Published in 1837. Concerns the years 1804-12. Volume 3: iii + 414pp. Published in 1837. Concerns the years 1812-15. Volume 4: iv + 383pp. Published in 1837. Concerns the years 1816-20. Volume 5: vii + 418pp. Published in 1837. Concerns the years 1820-25. Volume 6: ix + 393pp. Published in 1837. Concerns the years 1825-1826. Volume 7: xvi + 478pp. Published in 1838. Concerns the years 1826-32. An edition in 10 volumes was published in 1839, and an abridged version in 2 volumes in 1848.

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832): poet and novelist. Scott, trained as a barrister, was the famous author of works that include *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3), *Marmion* (1808), *Waverley* (1814) and *Guy Mannering* (1815).

John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854): biographer. Like Scott, Lockhart was called to the Bar but pursued a successful literary career instead of devoting himself to the law. He attained some notoriety as a *Blackwood's* contributor for his vigorous attacks in 1818 on the 'Cockney

School of Poetry' that included Leigh Hunt and John Keats. Lockhart also published a biography of Burns in 1828. He was Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law.

Alongside Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* and Southey's *Life of Nelson*, the work was frequently named by Victorian critics, and, indeed, later critics, as one of the best examples of British biography. Lockhart adopted the method of letting the subject speak as much as possible for himself, but also used an extensive number of anecdotes and letters. Lockhart took some liberties with his sources and altered letters and their chronology to make the narrative more cohesive. Lockhart's close knowledge of the man adds an important dimension to the work, and goes far in explaining the largely uncritical tone he maintains throughout but also the vividness of the portrait.

13.

[Anonymous], *The Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis, author of "The Monk," "Castle Spectre," with many pieces in prose and verse never before published* (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), 2 vols.

Volume 1: viii + 392. Portrait of the subject. Volume 2: iv + 388pp.

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818): novelist. Lewis achieved widespread fame for the Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), though he also authored a number of dramas and poems.

Margaret Baron-Wilson [née Harries, known as Mrs Cornwell Baron Wilson] (1797-1846): poet. Before her marriage to the solicitor Cornwell Baron Wilson in 1819, she published volumes of poetry, including *Astarte, a Sicilian Tale* (1818), which achieved some significant success. Other works include *The Cypress Wreath* (1828), and a romantic drama, *The Maid of Switzerland* (1834). Her work often reflects a concern with the idea of the separate spheres, and she defended the domestic emphasis of her writings. In 1833, she launched a magazine on literature and fashion, the *Weekly Belle Assemblée*. Her other biographies were the lives of Harriet, Duchess of St. Albans (1839), and a work of collective biography of actresses (1844).

The work's principal interest derives from its negotiation between scandal and decency. Baron-Wilson seeks to defend Monk from the calumnies born from his controversial work. However, her names does not appear anywhere in the biography and she calls herself an 'editor' rather than a biographer. (A number of biographers believed the author to be a man.) The nature of her subject leads Baron-Wilson to denounce the practice of comparing an author's work and his life, and opposes his wild work with his 'unblemished integrity' as a man. The biography is competently written and readable.

14.

Cole, John, *Memoirs of Mrs. Chapone; newly developed, from various authentic sources, embracing an account of the literature of the age in which she lived, accompanied by brief Anecdotes, or literary notices, of her contemporaries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1839).

ii + 102pp.

Hester Chapone [née Mulso] (1727-1801): writer. Chapone was the daughter of a Northamptonshire gentleman. She was one of the close acquaintances of Elizabeth Montagu and part of the group that gathered around Samuel Richardson. Chapone's husband, the solicitor John Chapone, died within one year of their marriage in 1761. Her published works include *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1772), which Mary Wollstonecraft enjoyed, and an essay in Johnson's *The Rambler* (no. 10, 1752).

John Cole (1792-1848): bookseller and antiquary. Cole became apprenticed in his youth to a bookseller, and during this employment began writing historical works. His *History*

of *Lincoln and Guide to its Curiosities and Antiquities* appeared in 1818. Cole published extensively after his move to Scarborough in 1821, and lectured on a wide variety of subjects. After running shops in various locations, he moved to Wellingborough in 1834 and opened a shop that doubled as a school. His works include an account of the career of Edmund Kean, critiques of dramatic performances, guides to Scarborough and numerous biographical sketches.

The biographer stresses that his subject moved 'calmly and placidly' through life. Nevertheless, Cole insists that her works enriched the nation and her character furnishes matter for imitation. The biographer refers to himself as a 'compiler', and adopts the method of quoting extensively from the subject's correspondence. The narrative lacks energy but solidly rehearses the main facts of the subject's life. The emphasis gradually moves from Chapone's literary career to her character, and the biography ends with a celebration of her 'amiable and virtuous' behaviour.

15.

Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History. Six Lectures. Reported with emendations and additions* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1841).

393pp.

Collective biography: Odin, Mahomet, Dante, Shakespeare, Luther, Knox, Johnson, Rousseau, Burns, Cromwell and Napoleon.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): historian, essayist and biographer. Carlyle was perhaps the pre-eminent influence on both Victorian biographies of 'great' lives and the lives of 'obscure' subjects. His own biographies were the life of Schiller (1823-4), the *Life of John Sterling* (1851 – see below), and a six-volume biography of Frederick the Great (1858-65 – see below). His essays on biography and history were also extremely important for later biographers.

The lectures (given in 1840) and their later publication were responsible for the identification of Carlyle as the period's principal champion of great lives and famous men, and those who found this vision of history and biography reductive found material for their argument here. Nevertheless, it is also here that Carlyle dwells at length on the importance of 'silent men' and the value of paying tribute to them, together with a celebration of silence itself. These biographical lectures also set out the power of great men to inspire a sense of wonder, which, if replicated, could create a 'world of heroes'.

16.

Morgan, Lady, *Woman and her master* (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 2 vols.

Volume 1: viii + 334pp. Volume 2: iv + 416pp.

Collective biography: the subjects are wide-ranging, including women from 'savage' life, women of the East and women of Classical Antiquity. Volume 1 is principally devoted to 'The Women of the Hebrews' and volume two to 'The Women of the Empire'.

Sydney Morgan [*née* Owenson] (bap. 1783-1859): novelist. Morgan, who was raised in Dublin, was the daughter of the comic actor Robert Owenson (1744-1812). She worked as a governess, and began to write poetry. She published her first volume, *Poems*, in 1801. Her marriage to Sir Thomas Charles Morgan (c. 1780-1843) took place in 1812. She became a popular novelist, and earned a huge sum for *Florence Macarthy* (1818). Her works often address both feminist and patriotic issues, and are influenced by French philosophers and writers such as Madame de Staël. She was given the first female civil-list pension for artistic services in 1837. Morgan was often attacked or mocked for her works and opinions, notably

by John Wilson Croker. Her other biographical works include a fictional biography of Salvator Rosa (1824).

The ironically-titled collective biography opens with strong feminist overtones, as it considers the progress made by humanity whilst measuring the enduring oppression of women who have been kept in slavery. It considers the methods used to enslave women, such as the control of female possessions. The biography aims to scan history to find examples of strong women and to plead for the cause of woman. Lady Morgan maintains a vigorous tone throughout the work, and denounces male endeavours to limit women's activities and influence. Only two of the four projected volumes were published.

17.

Prior, Sir James, *Life of Edmond Malone, Editor of Shakespeare, with selections from his manuscript anecdotes* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1840).

xii + 476pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1860.

Edmond Malone (1741-1812): Shakespearean scholar. Malone, who was born in Ireland, move to London in 1777, where he became a friend of Samuel Johnson, Sir Joseph Reynolds and Edmund Burke. He was also a close friend of James Boswell and provided significant assistance with the writing of *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) and the *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). Malone edited the works of Goldsmith (1780), Reynolds (1791) and Dryden (1800). He also revealed the forgeries of Thomas Chatterton and W. H. Ireland. Malone is principally renowned for his work on Shakespeare. He published an essay on the order of Shakespeare's play in 1778 and his edition of the plays appeared posthumously in 1821.

Sir James Prior (c. 1790-1869): writer and surgeon. James, who was born in Ireland, began his career as a navy surgeon, and he narrated his journeys in *Voyage Along the Eastern Coast of Africa* (1819) and *Voyage in the Indian Seas* (1820). He became assistant to the director-general of the medical department of the navy and deputy inspector of hospitals. He was also a member of the Royal Irish Academy and the Society of Antiquaries. Prior's biographical works include a celebrated biography of Edmund Burke (1824) and a *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (1837), which he later accused John Forster of plagiarizing for his own work published eleven years later.

The biographer asserts that biographies fulfil a necessary debt of honour from readers to literary men, and associates any kind of literary neglect with injustice. The work is solid and largely unremarkable, though there is an interesting emphasis in the preface on the biographer's quest for his sources. There is a patriotic Irish dimension to the work.

18.

Strickland, Agnes, *The Lives of the Queens of England From the Norman Conquest, compiled from official records and other authentic documents, private as well as public* (London: Henry Colburn, 1840-48), 12 vols.

Volume 1 published in 1840, volumes 2 and 3 published in 1841, volumes 4 and 5 published in 1842, volume 6 published in 1843, volume 7 published in 1844, volume 8 published in 1845, volume 9 published in 1846, volumes 10 and 11 published in 1847 and volume 12 published in 1848. Numerous republications and abridgements, including a revised edition in 8 volumes published in 1854.

Collective biography: Matilda of Flanders, Matilda of Scotland, Adelia of Louvaine, Matilda of Boulogne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Berengaria of Navarre, Isabella of Angoulême, Eleanor of Provence, Eleanora of Castile, Marguerite of France, Isabella of France, Philippa of Hainault, Anne of Bohemia, Isabella of Valois, Joanna of Navarre, Katherine of Valois,

Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Woodville, Anne of Warwick, Elizabeth of York, Katharine of Arragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Katharine Howard, Katharine Parr, Mary, Elizabeth, Anne of Denmark, Henrietta Maria, Catharine of Braganza, Mary Beatrice of Modena, Mary II and Anne.

Agnes Strickland (1796-1874): historian. Strickland achieved fame with her *Lives of the Queens of England* (1840-75), which she co-wrote with her sister Elizabeth (1794-1875). The companion *Lives of the Queens of Scotland* (1847-53) was similarly successful. The sisters strove to establish themselves as professional writers, and travelled throughout Europe to carry out extensive research for their numerous historical works. Their celebrity brought them numerous artistic and aristocratic acquaintances.

The Lives of the Queens of England is a seminal example of the contemporary successful genre of popular history. It is also significant in the balance it achieves between depicting Great Women's lives (as a corrective to the endless production of Great Men's lives) and a focus on the private and domestic aspects of these lives (something that was simultaneously being encouraged as a worthwhile form of historiography by writers such as Macaulay and Carlyle). Though many critics dismissed the volumes as light and feminine 'historical memoirs', and the biographies indeed contained some errors corrected by later, more academic, productions, the Strickland sisters carried out extensive research, made abundant use of primary sources, and the work remains useful and impressive, as well as highly readable. The Stricklands aimed to avoid personal bias: though Protestants themselves, their portrayal of queen Mary Tudor was sufficiently sympathetic to cause controversy. Elizabeth Strickland wrote many of the biographies, though her name does not appear on the title page.

19.

Wilson, John, *A Memoir of Mrs. Margaret Wilson, Of the Scottish Mission, Bombay; Including extracts from her letters and journals* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1840). Third edition.

xii + 636pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1844.

Margaret Wilson [*née* Bayne] (1795-1835): missionary's wife. Wilson was the daughter of a Christian minister, Kenneth Bayne. She married the missionary John Wilson in August 1828 and travelled with him to India where she helped to found and teach in a number of schools for native girls. Her work was impeded by frail health and four pregnancies in six years. She died in India.

John Wilson (1804-75): missionary. Wilson founded the Edinburgh Association of Theological Students in Aid of the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge in 1825, and became a member of the Scottish Missionary Society. He published the *Life of John Eliot, the Apostle of the Indians* in 1828. Wilson was ordained a missionary three years later, having prepared extensively for the role through medical and theological studies, and he was sent to India with his wife Margaret. The couple arrived in Bombay in 1829. Wilson, other than carrying out preaching and other missionary activities, wrote numerous works on Indian society, education, and missionary work. He was made President of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1835. After Margaret's death in 1835, he married Isabella Dennistoun in 1846, and they pursued missionary works together.

A Memoir of Mrs. Margaret Wilson makes extensive use of letters and personal testimonials, with very little connecting narrative. The value of the work resides largely in the subject's lively letters. In the Preface, Wilson expresses a wish that the work may stimulate further missionary zeal. The work includes Margaret Wilson's own review of *The Life of Mrs.*

Judson, which provides an interesting moment in which one female missionary reflects upon the life of another, and discusses the value of female missionary biography.

20.

Elwood, Mrs, *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England, from the commencement of the last century* (London: Henry Colburn, 1843), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 331pp + Vol. 2: 347pp. Another edition in 4 volumes was published the same year.

Collective biography: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Lady Murray (Duchess of Somerset), Mrs Delany, Mrs Elizabeth Carter, Miss Talbot, Mrs Montagu, Mrs Sheridan, Mrs Chapone, Mrs Trimmer, Mrs Barbauld, Miss Seward, Mrs Hannah More, Mrs Charlotte Smith, Mrs Inchbald, Mrs Piozzi, Madame D'Arblay, Mrs Grant (of Laggan), Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton, Mrs Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Mrs Radcliffe, Miss Jane Austen, Miss Elizabeth Smith, Mrs Brunton, Mrs Hemans, Miss Jane Taylor, Miss A. M. Porter, Mrs. Maclean and Miss Emma Roberts.

Anne Katharine Elwood [*née* Curteis] (1796-1873): writer and traveller. Elwood was the daughter of the classical scholar and MP Edward Jeremiah Curteis (1762-1835). Her marriage to Major Charles William Elwood (1781/2-1860) took place in 1824, and the following year she became one of the first women to accompany her husband to India. Elwood travelled extensively, and she published accounts of her voyages, including *Narrative of a Journey Overland from England to India* (1830).

Elwood announces the work as the first collective biography of literary women. The biographer's voice is tentatively self-defined as 'light', and the sketches include gossip and subjective comments, prompted by Elwood's personal acquaintance with many of the women. Nevertheless, the biographer makes some attempt at critical assessment, and provides an overview of the critical reception of, and a bibliography for, each subject. The sketches include an assessment of the worth of the subjects as women, in terms of more conventional feminine 'virtues'. The collective biography is principally interesting as an early attempt at the canonisation of female writers.

21.

Holmes, A *Sister's record: Or memoir of Mrs. Marcus H. Holmes* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1844). Second edition.

176pp.

Mrs Marcus H. Holmes (1804-43): religious writer. Holmes and her sister Elizabeth were the daughters of a country parson. She was a less well-known writer than her sister, and most of her poems were circulated privately.

Elizabeth Holmes (fl. 1830-44): religious writer. Holmes was Mrs. Marcus H. Holmes's sister. Holmes evoked life in a parsonage in *Scenes in Our Parish. By a "Country Parson's" Daughter* (1830), a popular work which was reprinted in 1833, and was followed by *Realities of Life. By a Country Parson's Daughter* in 1838.

The work is a fairly representative example of contemporary religious biography, though it dwells to an unusual extent on the subject's childhood. The biographer insists that the subject's life was a 'simple history' and places a strong emphasis on the subject's accomplishment of her duties. Holmes's literary activities are deemed to have been less important than the subject's work with the old and the blind. The biographical sketch is 131 pages; the rest of the work consists of the subject's poems.

22.

James, John, *Poems by John Nicholson, the Airedale Poet; With A Sketch of His Life and Writings* (London: Longman, Brown & Co., 1844).

xliii + 203pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1876.

John Nicholson (1790-1843): poet. Nicholson was a journeyman woolcomber and sorter who wrote poetry in his spare time. Nicholson found a patron in the person of the Bradford mill owner John Garnett Horsfall (1788-1848). He became known as the Airedale Poet. His small success led him to abandon his employment but local lionizing soon gave way to poverty and neglect as he carelessly spent the money he earned and suffered from alcoholism. He is best known for the poem *Airedale in Ancient Times* (1825).

John James (1811-67): antiquary and writer. James worked as a clerk's solicitor in Yorkshire and then Bradford. He published a *History and Topography of Bradford* in 1841, and revised and expanded it in 1866. In the late 1860s he began work as a journalist for the *Leeds Times* and *York Courant*. James was elected FSA in 1856. His other important works include an edition of the poems of Robert Story (1795-1860), published in 1861, and a seminal *History of the Worsted Manufacture in England from the Earliest Times* (1857).

The work is a biography of an 'uneducated' poet who achieved some local notoriety. The biographer is interested in balancing Romantic and Victorian ideas on the figure of the poet. James draws on the common idea that poets are more vulnerable to misery and alienation, and places a strong emphasis on the subject's early appreciation of his natural environment, though there is also an interest in self-help. An interesting moment within the sketch occurs when John James reflects on the life of John Clare in connection with the tradition of 'uneducated poets'. The biography only occupies 36 pages of the volume, and the rest consists of poems. As with Robert Southey's *Attempts in Verse...* (1831 – see above) the work was published by subscription.

23.

Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, D. D* (London: B. Fellowes, 1844), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 392pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: 432pp. Published the same year by Ward Lock and Lo. Reprinted in 1845, 1846, 1852, 1858, 1877, 1887, 1890, 1891 and 1970.

Thomas Arnold (1795-1842): headmaster of Rugby. Arnold was headmaster of Rugby between 1828 and 1842 and was responsible for raising the school's reputation. His ideas on education influenced numerous important nineteenth-century writers, including Matthew Arnold (his son) and Arthur Hugh Clough. Arnold also notoriously attacked the Oxford Movement of the 1830s.

Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815-81): dean of Westminster. Stanley was one of Thomas Arnold's pupils at Rugby from 1829, and Arnold's influence on his development was immense. His ensuing studies at Oxford were outstanding, and he won numerous prizes. He was ordained a priest in 1843. Stanley supported religious tolerance and, after becoming college tutor of University College, Oxford, tried to diffuse inflammatory religious controversies. (His own sister Mary became a Roman Catholic in 1856.) Stanley became canon of Canterbury in 1851 before returning to Oxford as regius professor of ecclesiastical history in 1856. He was named dean of Westminster in 1864. Stanley published widely on ecclesiastical matters.

The biography is notable for having been singled out by many post-Victorian critics as the work that marked a decline in biographical standards and the beginning of nineteenth-century whitewashing, hero-worshipping biographies. Though this portrayal is somewhat unfair, Stanley does stress that the publication of 'domestic details' would infringe on

Arnold's privacy and the work is laudatory throughout. The biographer avoids presenting himself as a judge of the life, but insists in the preface that he has assessed Arnold's actions and words according to whether or not they seemed characteristic of the man. Stanley, who was commissioned to write the biography by Arnold's widow, had at first wanted the biography to be composed by several writers who would offer their own perspective on the subject. Instead, he relies heavily on Arnold's own words. Each chapter offers an introductory narrative by Stanley, followed by an unbroken selection of letters.

24.

Craik, G. L., *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties, illustrated by Female Examples* (London: C. Cox, 1847).

426pp.

Collective biography: hundreds of subjects are considered, including theological and philosophical writers, critics, letter-writers, historians, medical practitioners and astronomers.

George Lillie Craik (1798-1866): didactic writer. Craik, the son of a schoolmaster, was born in Scotland. He initially set out for a career in the church but instead moved to London and began to write extensively for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and the publisher Charles Knight. He moved in a literary circle that included Leigh Hunt, John Forster and Thomas Carlyle. He was appointed Professor of English Literature and History at Belfast in 1849. His other publications include numerous histories of English history and culture such as *Outlines of the History of the English Language* (1851) and *Manual of English Literature* (1862).

The work is a companion volume to Craik's earlier *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (1830-1 – see above), which focused on the lives of hard-working men both famous and obscure. Unlike the earlier volume, which was often reprinted, this one was less successful. It is, however, similarly wide-ranging, with a slightly different angle, as it acknowledges that *any* knowledge or success achieved by women has been done under difficulties. The work contains tentatively expressed feminist claims and states that intellectual activities can be deemed to enhance female happiness.

25.

Hare, Julius Charles, *Essays and Tales by John Sterling, collected and edited, with a Memoir of his Life* (London: John W. Parker, 1848), 2 vols.

Memoir: 232pp.

John Sterling (1806-44): poet and writer. Sterling, the son of the famous journalist Edward Sterling (1773-1847), hesitated throughout his short life between a career in the Church, a literary career and the law. Sterling produced a number of works, including the novel *Arthur Coningsby* (1833), a book of poems (1839) and collection of essays and tales (1848), none of which achieved any noteworthy degree of success. He was above all remembered as having a remarkable talent for friendship. An early member of the Cambridge Apostles, he drew around him men such as John Stuart Mill and Tennyson and, later, Thomas Carlyle. After a protracted illness, Sterling died of consumption.

Julius Charles Hare (1795-1855): writer and clergyman. Hare developed an interest in German literature during his time at Cambridge, championed German scholarship and amassed an extensive collection of German books. Hare became a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1818, and taught John Sterling and F. D. Maurice, amongst others. He was ordained a priest in 1826. Hare took up the curacy of Herstmonceux in 1832 and became archdeacon of Lewes in 1840. He regularly pleaded for religious tolerance but became embroiled in debates with John Henry Newman. Hare published works of philosophical and

theological reflections, including the immensely popular *Guesses at Truth* (1827), written with his brother Augustus William Hare. He also published a controversial translation of Niebuhr's *History of Rome* (1828-42), translations and numerous critical essays.

Hare makes the theme of Sterling's vocation a central one in the biography, as Carlyle did in his 1851 biography of Sterling (see below). The principal thrust of Hare's biography is that John Sterling's allegiance to the Church was stronger than his literary inclinations. The work is structured loosely as a sketch, despite its length, and provides no chapters but a seamless narrative. Hare makes extensive use of quotations from Sterling and extracts from his letters and works, and does not allow his own voice as biographer to intrude heavily. The biography is now principally remembered as the work to which Thomas Carlyle provided a riposte in 1851 with *The Life of John Sterling*, in order to vigorously object to Hare claiming Sterling for the church. Carlyle's work is undoubtedly a more successful biography. Hare was greatly afflicted throughout his life by the belief that he had damaged Sterling's reputation and launched the intense public debate surrounding Sterling's life and character, which was precisely what the subject's friends had hoped would be avoided.

26.

Monckton Milnes, Richard, edited by, *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats* (London: Edward Moxon, 1848), 2 vols.

Volume 1: 287pp. Portrait of the subject. Volume 2: 414pp. Revised version printed in 1867. Reprinted in 1906, 1927, 1931, 1938 and 1946.

John Keats (1795-1821): poet. Keats abandoned a career as a surgeon to pursue his poetical aspirations. His early efforts attracted little public attention, or the negative attention of which John Gibson Lockhart's attack on the 'Cockney School of Poetry' was the most famous example. Keats's life was increasingly plagued by poor health, and he died of tuberculosis in Italy. Keats's passionate relationship with Fanny Brawne was only fully divulged long after his death. His works include *Endymion* (1818) and *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820).

Richard Monckton Milnes, later first Baron Houghton (1809-85): author and politician. Milnes was a member of the Cambridge Apostles and a friend of Tennyson, Arthur Hallam and William Makepeace Thackeray. Throughout his life he divided his considerable energies between literary work and politics as an MP for Pontefract, 1837-63. Though his biography of Keats was perhaps his most important literary work, he gained a strong reputation as a patron to struggling talents such as Algernon Charles Swinburne, the Brownings, Coventry Patmore and Walter Savage Landor. As well as working for the recognition of Keats, he championed William Blake and assisted Alexander Gilchrist with his 1863 biography of the painter-poet (see below).

The work is significant as the first full-length biography of Keats, who Milnes introduced to readers as a robust and somewhat humourless figure with the hope of making the subject more appealing to a Victorian audience. The biographer avoids mentioning Fanny Brawne. A further interest of the biography lies in Milnes's recurrent discussion of fame and obscurity, and his reflections on England's attitudes to its poets. Despite relying somewhat too heavily on excerpts from letters and poems, the biography is well written. Most of volume 2 consists of Keats's 'Literary Remains'.

27.

Sherman, Mr, *The Pastor's Wife: A Memoir of Mrs. Sherman of Surrey Chapel* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1848).

464pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1868.

Martha Sherman [*née* Tucker] (1806-1848): minister's wife and philanthropist. Sherman was born into a family of devout evangelicals. Her sister Mary was shy and retiring and died aged twenty-two, whereas Martha was popular and engaging. When Martha reached her twenties she began visiting the poor and sick in her neighbourhood. Upon hearing some religious lectures her attraction to Christianity increased. Martha married James Sherman in March 1835 and supported her husband's activities. She died of consumption.

James Sherman (1796-1862): Congregational minister. Sherman, who was originally apprenticed to an ivory turner, devoted himself to religion and was eventually ordained in 1818. From 1821 to 1836 he served as a minister in Reading. Sherman married his first wife in 1822, and she died in 1834. Two years later, he led the congregation of the Surrey Chapel in London. Together with his wife, he succeeded in doubling the attendance of the church, which became the largest congregation in London. His moderate views were combined with a concern for the welfare of the poor, and he founded the Christian Mutual Provident Society in 1847. Sherman resigned eight years after his wife's death and led the Congregational church in Blackheath, London, which again became highly successful. Sherman was also a fervent abolitionist, and, when Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in book form, it was published with introductory remarks by Sherman, at whose house Stowe lived whilst in England. Sherman's other published works include a biography of William Allen (1851), *A Guide to Acquaintance with God* (1826) and a volume of psalms and hymns (1841).

The biography was one of the most popular evangelical biographies published during the period: the 1868 edition is announced as the thirteenth thousand printing. The work is simply written and avoids quoting too extensively from letters and diaries. The biographer describes the subject as a 'beloved saint' and the portrait is overwhelmingly positive. There is little sense of the subject's own voice, however, as it is submerged beneath the biographer's and God's agency is stressed rather than her own actions. The biographer adroitly develops the idea of silent and unconscious influence. The work includes a detailed and lengthy account of Mrs. Sherman's illness and death.

28.

Barham, Reverend R. H. Dalton, *The Life and Remains of Theodore Edward Hook* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 354pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: 360pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1877 and 1975.

Theodore Edward Hook (1788-1841): writer. Hook was a popular author of 'silver-fork' novels, light verses and dramas. He also edited *John Bull*. His successful novels include *Maxwell* (1830), *Gilbert Gurney* (1836) and *Jack Brag* (1837).

Reverend Richard Harris Barham [*known as* Thomas Ingoldsby] (1788-1845): clergyman and writer. Barham was ordained curate in 1813 and worked in a parish in Kent., before accepting a minor canonry at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1821. Two years later, he began to edit the *London Chronicle*, and he submitted numerous articles to leading periodicals. Barham was an official adviser of the publisher Richard Bentley. He became a founding member of the Garrick Club in 1832 and formed friendships with Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Reade. From 1837, he published his popular *Ingoldsby Legends* under the pseudonym of one Thomas Ingoldsby who had unearthed ancient documents. The legends were illustrated by some of the period's pre-eminent artists and remained in print throughout the century. His own biography was published by his son in 1880.

The biography is lively and makes good use of the opportunities provided by the subject for anecdotes and humour. Barham often uses direct speech to bring scenes to life. The interest of the work derives more, however, from the nature of the subject than the

particular skill of the biographer. The work displays contemporary ideas on the relationship between biography and privacy: the biographer avoids trespassing into the privacy of Hook's private life but dwells on his debts in depth. The second volume consists of Hook's literary remains.

29.

Ramsay, Thomas, *The Life and Literary Remains of Barbara Hofland* (London: W. J. Cleaver, 1849).

xvi + 224 pp.

Barbara Hofland [*née* Wreaks] (bap. 1770-1844): children's writer and novelist. Hofland was the daughter of the ironmonger Robert Wreaks (d. 1773), and was brought up by her aunt. She married the businessman Thomas Bradshawe Hoole (1766-99) in 1796. Hoole died three years later and left her in poverty, and though she had written verse in her youth, she then turned to the pen for financial support. Her *Poems*, published in 1805, sold well. She remarried in 1810, to the landscape artist Thomas Christopher Hofland (1777-1843). They moved to London and Hofland pursued her literary career. Her tale *The Daughter-in-Law* (1812) received royal approval, and her children's book *The Son of a Genius* (1812) was extremely popular and frequently reprinted. She published over seventy works. Despite her success, the couple remained poor, and the relationship was difficult – Hofland raised one of her husband's illegitimate children as her own.

Thomas Ramsay (n.d.): writer. Little is known of Ramsay, who also published a travel book, *A Glance of Belgium and the Rhine* (1845) and published lectures on public education and Christian socialism.

The biographer strains to bring the work as closely as possible to an autobiography and provides little narrative of his own. One of the principal interests of the work lies in Ramsay's unease with the idea of a female literary career and female financial success. The work begins with a lengthy reflection on women as professional writers, and singles out Hannah More for particular attention. Ramsay is both bold in considering this wider tradition and nervous in applying it to Hofland. He attempts to resolve this by arguing that Hofland was successful precisely because she did not aim for success.

30.

Scott, William Bell, *Memoir of David Scott, R. S. A., containing his journal in Italy, notes on Art and Other Papers, with Seven Illustrations* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1850).

vi + 443pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1975.

David Scott (1806-49): poet and painter. Scott was the son of a Scottish engraver. The death of four elder brothers in 1807 affected his parents deeply, and David, together with his brother and future biographer William Bell, was brought up in a solitary and grim household. He entered the Trustee's Academy between 1821 and 1825 and worked as his father's apprentice. He co-founded the Edinburgh Life Academy Association in 1827, and further developed his art through travels in Italy. Scott was attracted to supernatural subjects and images of both death and terror. He became a member of the Scottish Academy in 1829. His work included engravings inspired by Flaxman, William Blake and the poetry of Coleridge. Scott's work was barely known in his lifetime and his poems were only published posthumously.

William Bell Scott (1811-90): poet and painter. William Bell was the brother of David Scott. Like his brother, he trained at the Trustee's Academy and formed part of his brother's close circle of artistic friends. He exhibited his first painting at the Royal Academy in 1834,

and exhibited *The Old English Ballad Singer* at the British Institution in 1839. In London, Scott became friends with Leigh Hunt, Benjamin Haydon and Thomas Carlyle, amongst others, and with the Pre-Raphaelites in particular. Despite his association with them, his own work was, to his frustration, never considered by Ruskin. He became master of the School of Design of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1843. Scott's fortunes improved through the help of his patron Lady Trevelyan of Wallington Hall (1806-66), who gave him numerous commissions, including *Iron and Coal, the Nineteenth Century*. His poems include the collection *Poems*, published in 1854.

The biographer describes the work as a 'labour of love'. The work's distinguishing quality lies in the biographer's flowery prose that strives for poetic effect and, in its most successful passages, reflects movingly on the task of the biographer who looks back on the life of a departed friend or relative. Scott, unusually, addresses the work to 'you alone, with no public in the background', though the identity of this addressee is never revealed and gradually becomes assimilated with the reader. The biographer alludes to Thomas Carlyle when reflecting on the nature of fame and the inevitable fading of reputations and displays signs of Carlyle's influence by introducing reflections on contemporary society. It is, in stylistic terms, one of the more idiosyncratic and interesting works of Victorian biography.

31.

Waring, Elijah, *The Bard of Liberty: or Recollections and Anecdotes of Edward Williams, the Bard of Glamorgan (Lolo Morganwg, B, B, D.)* (Ilanidloes and Rhayader: Published by John Pryse, Bookseller, 1850).

18pp.

Edward Williams [*pseudo.* Iolo Morganwg] (1747-1826): poet and literary forger. Williams, the son of a stonemason, was born in Wales. Williams entered his father's profession and pursued his trade in London, where he met Gwyneddigion, who stimulated his interest in poetry. Williams began to forge Welsh medieval poetry and manuscripts to escape his mounting debts, and spent some time in prison, where he composed further verses. Williams moved to Bath, and then London, in the early 1790s, and enjoyed the friendship of men such as Robert Southey. His fortunes fluctuated, and he became addicted to laudanum. In 1797 he became attracted to Unitarianism, and co-founded the South Wales Unitarian Society in 1812, and published hymns. He also continued to publish works on druid bards, ancient Welsh lore and history until his death.

Elijah Waring (c. 1788-1857): journalist. Waring's early work included a preface to the poems published by Sarah Newman in 1811. During the 1840s he worked as sub-commissioner on the subject of children's employment for South Gloucestershire, and he provided a report on the condition of female and child employment there. Waring was principally known as the close friend of Iolo Morganwg. His daughter, Anna Laetitia Waring (1820-1910), was a popular hymn writer.

The biographical sketch is reprinted from the *Eclectic Review*. The local interest of the subject is stressed, though the biographer is nervous in stating the case for the importance of the subject, and is keen to mention that Robert Southey approved of the work.

32.

Carlyle, Thomas, *The Life of John Sterling* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851).

iv + 344pp. Reprinted in 1852, 1857, 1870, 1871, 1888, 1893, 1894, 1897, 1900, 1902, 1905 and 1907.

John Sterling (1806-44): poet and writer. Sterling, the son of the famous journalist Edward Sterling (1773-1847), hesitated throughout his short life between a career in the

Church, a literary career and the law. Sterling produced a number of works, including the novel *Arthur Coningsby* (1833), a book of poems (1839) and collection of essays and tales (1848), none of which achieved any noteworthy degree of success. He was above all remembered as having a remarkable talent for friendship. An early member of the Cambridge Apostles, he drew around him men such as John Stuart Mill and Tennyson and, later, Thomas Carlyle. After a protracted illness, Sterling died of consumption.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): historian, essayist and biographer. Carlyle was perhaps the pre-eminent influence on both Victorian biographies of 'great' lives and the lives of 'obscure' subjects. His own biographies were the life of Schiller (1823-4), the lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History* (1841 – see above), and a six-volume biography of Frederick the Great (1858-65 – see below). His essays on biography and history were also extremely important for later biographers.

The work is undoubtedly one of the most important biographies of the nineteenth century. Carlyle wrote *The Life of John Sterling* as a riposte to Hare's 1848 biography (see above) with the intention of proving that 'Artist, not Saint' was the main thrust of Sterling's life. Carlyle also used the work to test his ideas on the flexibility of biography as a genre and to attempt to write the life of a man who was not demonstrably 'Great'. The biography is particularly noteworthy for its use of a tragic three-act structure, and for its ambiguous attitude to the public nature of biography.

33.

Conder, Josiah, *The Poet of the Sanctuary: A Centenary Commemoration of the Labours and Services Literary and Devotional of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D., preceded by remarks on the origin of psalmody and Christian hymnology in earlier times* (London: John Snow, 1851).

viii + 142pp.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748): minister and writer. Watts was born and raised in Southampton, the son of a clothier. He gained an excellent education at a dissenting academy. Watts became a member of the Independent church in 1693. His most important appointment was at the Independent church in Mark Lane, London, where he worked from 1699. Watts wrote numerous collections of verse and hymns, including *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) and *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language, for the Use of Children* (1715), which was later enjoyed by Samuel Johnson.

Josiah Conder (1789-1855): bookseller and writer. Conder, the son of a map engraver and bookseller, was born in London. He joined his father's business from the age of thirteen. Conder began writing in his youth and contributed poems and essays to the *Monthly Preceptor* and *The Athenaeum*. His volume, *The Associate Minstrels*, which was published anonymously in 1810, was successful. Conder owned the *Eclectic Review* and managed it between 1814 and 1837. He also compiled thirty volumes for the popular Modern Traveller series, despite never having travelled beyond England. In 1851, Conder also published *The Psalms of David Imitated by I. Watts, Revised by J. Conder* (1851).

The biography was written by request of the Committee of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and was originally intended to be read aloud. The biographer begins by considering the patriotic importance of a nation's ballads and, by extension, of those who compose them. The biography is simple and rather unengaging, but serves as an example of biography that did seek to provide longer accounts of obscure historical figures, though this remained unusual and often confined to similarly short portraits for the intention of local societies. The work is of principally local importance and demonstrates the use of biography as a means of consolidating local identities.

34.

Hood, Edwin Paxton, *Genius and Industry: The Achievements of Mind Among the Cottages* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1851).

vii + 194pp. Reprinted in 1852.

Collective biography: James Watt, James Brindley, William Herschell, Daniel Gumb, John Bethune, John Ludwig, Thomas Britton, William Hutton, John Critchely Prince, William Thom, Spencer Hall, Thomas Miller, Elihu Burritt and Ebenezer Elliott.

Edwin Paxton Hood (1820-85): writer, Congregational minister and temperance worker. Hood, who attended the 1848 Paris peace conference as a delegate, often included controversial political elements in his preaching. His congregation included both middle-class and working-class men and women. His writings are diverse, and encompass analyses of the age, such as *The Age and its Architects* (1852), hymns, collective biographies and temperance works. He also edited the *Eclectic Review*, championed Robert Browning's poetry, and published a study of Thomas Carlyle: *Thomas Carlyle, philosophic thinker, theologian, historian and poet* (1875).

The work grew out of the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s. The biographer seeks to demonstrate the somewhat oxymoronic claim that genius is not extraordinary but a common gift and on the belief that genius cannot dispense with industry. Hood suggests that poverty can stimulate exertion and that poverty may be a beneficial condition. The collective biography is a weaker example of Hood's collective biographies than *The Literature of Labour* (1851 - see below).

35.

Hood, Edwin Paxton, *The Literature of Labour: Illustrious Instances of the Education of Poetry in Poverty* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1851).

247pp.

Collective biography: Robert Nicoll, John Clare, James Hogg, Thomas Cooper and Hugh Miller.

Edwin Paxton Hood (1820-85): writer, Congregational minister and temperance worker. Hood, who attended the 1848 Paris peace conference as a delegate, often included controversial political elements in his preaching. His congregation included both middle-class and working-class men and women. His writings are diverse, and encompass analyses of the age, such as *The Age and its Architects* (1852), hymns, collective biographies and temperance works. He also edited the *Eclectic Review*, championed Robert Browning's poetry, and published a study of Thomas Carlyle: *Thomas Carlyle, philosophic thinker, theologian, historian and poet* (1875).

The biographer presents the work as a means of enabling the more educated classes to encounter the humble, of whom they know little. Hood celebrates the type of biography that depicts the lives of unknown men, or 'Biography in the silence of obscure life'. The work offers an interesting reflection on the looseness of terms such as 'working classes' and 'labouring classes'. A lengthy introduction provides a far more diverse context for 'uneducated poets' than earlier works on these subjects such as Robert Southey's - Hood includes Shakespeare as an early and illustrious example. The tone is highly rapturous and enthusiastic throughout the work, and Hood celebrates the 'divine life in the Workshop!' and the poetry that lies 'in the very idea of Labour!' The biographer attempts to provide some serious literary criticism in the work, and their lives are narrated in straightforward and simple terms.

36.

Kavanagh, Julia, *Women of Christianity, exemplary for acts of piety and charity* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1852).

x + 474 pp.

Collective biography: over fifty subjects are discussed, and divided by historical period ('The Roman Empire', 'The Middle Ages', 'The Seventeenth Century' and 'The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries').

Julia Kavanagh (1824-77): novelist and biographer. Kavanagh, who was born in Ireland, spent some significant amount of her childhood in France, an experience that is reflected in many of her works, and the novel *Nathalie* (1850) in particular. Kavanagh achieved significant success with her collective biographies of women, such as *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* (1850), *French Women of Letters* (1862) and *English Women of Letters* (1862 – see below).

The work is important, not only in attempting to establish a tradition of female biography but also for turning away from subjects who had displayed acts of heroism and embracing instead more 'lowly' subjects. The biographer acknowledges that female lives, private in their essence, are those that are most liable to be neglected and forgotten. The values praised in these women are, however, domestic values and sacrifice, which are also deemed by Kavanagh to be the foundation of Christianity. She is also aware of the difficulty of making 'good' subjects interesting. Kavanagh is keen to give the work a scholarly dimension and provides a list of authors consulted, which was still relatively unusual at this time. There is an attempt to find a balance between a general historical narrative (with reflections, for example, on charity and seventeenth-century French women) and individual sketches. As Kavanagh approaches the nineteenth century, subjects are given more prominence and longer discussions, culminating in Elizabeth Fry, to whom two whole chapters are devoted, and Sarah Martin, who is discussed in one chapter.

37.

Mackenzie, Eneas, *Memoirs of Mrs. Caroline Chisholm, and Sketches of her Philanthropic Labours in India, Australia and England* (London: Webb, Millington & Co., 1852).

ix + 187pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1853.

Caroline Chisholm [*née* Jones] (1808-1877): immigration administrator. Chisholm was the daughter of a Northampton farmer, converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism following her marriage to Captain Archibald Chisholm (1798-1877), and travelled to Australia after a brief stay in Madras. She opened a home and employment agency in the old immigration barracks and found work (and husbands) for the girls, before continuing administrative emigration activities in England. She published *Female Immigration Considered* in 1842. Chisholm was the first woman to engage in formal parliamentary work, and achieved fame as the 'Emigrant's Friend'.

Eneas Mackenzie (fl. 1852-7): civil servant. Mackenzie worked as a reporter in law courts before entering the civil service in the Colonial department. He left for Australia in the 1850s and applied for a post as Police Magistrate in Richmond, Victoria, in 1854. He lived in Australia for some time, and some of the Gothic-style houses he had erected in Richmond are some of the oldest in the area. He also published *Mackenzie's Australian Emigrant's Guide* (1852) and *The Emigrant's Guide to Australia with a memoir of Mrs. Chisholm* (1853).

The biographer feels that hero-worship is currently under threat, and presents his own biography as an attempt to keep the feeling of hero-worship alive. Nevertheless, he questions the future fame of his subject. Throughout the biography, the emphasis is almost entirely on

Chisholm's work rather than her private life or even her personal reflections. The work is largely composed of lively dialogues between individuals and the subject, and there are echoes of Henry Mayhew's work in the interest displayed by the biographer in collecting miniature biographies and vignettes of working-class lives. There is no real sense of chronology or progression.

38.

Ray, Thomas, *The Aged Pilgrim and his songs: Or, memoir and poetical remains of the Rev. James Raban* (London: Ward & Co., 1852).

224pp.

James Raban (n.d.): clergyman. Raban published a small number of sermons in the early nineteenth century and combined his clerical duties with the composition of religious songs.

Thomas Ray (fl. 1852-69). Little is known of Thomas Ray, who was a friend of his subject the reverend James Raban. In 1869, Thomas also published a biographical sketch of the Minister of Hanover Chapel, Peckam, Robert Wye Betts.

Ray justifies writing the biography of a man directly described as 'unknown' by alluding to the common argument that the experience of every life is of interest and contributes to a greater understanding of humanity. The work is an example of biographies that sought to celebrate the local rather than the national, and celebrates Olney in Buckinghamshire through the subject. The biographer is uninterested in analysing the poems or giving them undue importance, and the piety of the subject is of far more interest to him than the literary dimension. The life is described in religious terms, and the Christian dimension dominates the narrative to the extent that facts and dates are difficult to extract from the work. The biography is 133 pages, and the rest of the work is composed of poems.

39.

Clarke, Reverend Thomas Grey, *A Memoir of Anna Maria Clarke, wife of the Rev. Thomas Clarke, vicar of Mitcheldever, Hants* (London: Harry Woolridge, 1853).

ix + 482 pp.

Anna Maria Clarke (1791-1827): clergyman's wife. Clarke lived a religious and entirely uneventful life. The biographer is her son.

Reverend Thomas Grey Clarke (fl. 1853-66): clergyman. Clarke, who was educated at Oxford, was the incumbent of Woodmancote and Popham, Hants. He also worked as the vicar at Odiham in Hampshire. He married Matilda Barbara Coventry in 1843 and Georgina Craven in 1863. He also published a short sermon on the death of Francis Baron Northbrook in 1866.

Clarke is interested in Christian biography as a distinctive genre, and traces this back to the biographical nature of the Bible. He argues that the taste for Christian biography was growing during this period, despite the risk of pollution of the genre from fictitious memoirs masquerading as biographies. The work is a traditional religious biography, with extensive quotations from the Scriptures, diary entries and letters that deal with questions of theology and that obscure the details of the life itself. The principal interest of the work lies in its description of parochial life and neighbourhood networks. The death scene is protracted.

40.

Balfour, Clara Lucas, *Working Women of the last Half Century: the lesson of their lives* (London: William & Frederick G. Cash, 1854).

x + 384pp. Reprinted in 1856, 1860 and 1868.

Collective biography: Mrs Trimmer, Mrs Hannah More and her sisters, Mrs Barbauld, Elizabeth Smith, Charlotte Elizabeth, Mrs Sherman, Mrs Mary Lundie Duncan, Sarah Martin, Mrs Ann H. Judson and Hannah Kilman.

Clara Lucas Balfour [*née* Lucas] (1808-78): writer and temperance worker. Balfour was born into a humble but educated family. She came to prominence, and became patronized by the Carlyles, through her attack on Owenism, *Common Sense versus Socialism*, written between 1837 and 1840. Her temperance work was partly fuelled by her experience of her husband's excessive drinking and she became the president of the British Women's Temperance Association in 1877. She expanded her lectures on alcohol to include discussions of history, biography and women's rights and became a professional lecturer and writer on a wide variety of subjects.

Whilst placing woman's proper activities within the domestic sphere, this collective biography opens with an introductory chapter that calls in vigorous language for an extension of female opportunities of activity and usefulness. The condition of women is seen as inextricably linked to the progress of the nation. A less feminist aspect of the work is present in Balfour's insistence that the 'lively fancy' of women means that women should temper their enthusiasm and study reality, as offered by biography rather than fiction. The sketches themselves are fairly representative of female collective biography, and balances praise for active women with gentle condemnations of subjects that demonstrated stubbornness or qualities deemed unfeminine. The preface also proposes a revision of the unsatisfactory term 'working classes'.

41.

Crosland, Mrs Newton, *Memorable Women: The Story of Their Lives* (London: David Bogue, 1854).

408 pp. Reprinted in 1870 (advertised as the fourth edition).

Collective biography: Rachel Wriothesley (Lady Russell), Madame D'Arblay, Mrs Piozzi, Mary L. Ware, Mrs. Hutchinson, Lady Fanshawe, Margaret Fuller, Marchessa Ossoli and Lady Sale.

Camilla Dufour Crosland [*née* Toulmin] (1812-1895): writer. Crosland's childhood was marked by financial hardships and illness. She attempted to earn a living through a governess position and as a jewellery maker. In 1837 she began to publish poetry and short stories, which appeared in magazines and periodicals, and later some realist novels, including *Hubert Freeth's Prosperity* (1873), which met with no great success or acclaim. She also translated the dramatic works of Victor Hugo. She married Newton Crosland in 1848 and, with her husband, moved in spiritualist circles. Her defence of spiritualism, *Light in the Valley*, appeared in 1857. Crosland published her memoir, *Landmarks of a Literary Life*, in 1893.

The introduction stresses that the subjects have not been chosen simply for their brilliance but also for the domestic virtue and worth as mothers and daughters. The work is an unremarkable example of female collective biography aimed at stimulating similar exertions of virtue amongst its readers.

42.

Backhouse, Katharine, *Memoir of Samuel Capper* (London: William & Frederick G. Cash, 1855).

vii + 230pp.

Samuel Capper (1782-1852): Quaker minister and temperance worker. Samuel was the son of Jasper and Anne Capper. He converted at the age of thirteen. In 1803 Capper

married the daughter of his employer, Elizabeth, with whom he raised nine children. He became a draper in Bristol but disliked deriving pecuniary profit from the sale of items that 'fed the vain mind' and he decided to find employment on a farm instead. Capper and his family moved to Wiltshire in 1809 and he became increasingly religious. Capper first spoke as a minister in 1813. He became a travelling minister, and was acknowledged as a minister of the gospel in 1817 by the monthly meeting of Friends. Capper also travelled and preached in France in 1824, and accomplished further tours in Ireland.

Katharine Backhouse [*née* Capper] (1792-1882): Quaker writer. Backhouse, a Quaker from Darlington who married into a notable family of Quaker bankers, also wrote a short memoir of her mother, Mary Capper (1847, reprinted in 1848 and 1860). Samuel Capper was her father.

The work is a fairly representative religious biography with a clear didactic intent: the biographer hopes that the 'example of a persevering endeavour to serve the Lord Jesus' will 'prove a stimulus to the young'. The biographer finds value in the life of one who never attempted 'great things'. Though the work itself is competently written, the biographer relies too heavily on the subject's letters. The principal interest of the work lies in its lively account of the existence of contemporary travelling ministers.

43.

Barlow, Thomas Worthington, *Memoir of William Broome; LL.D, the Associate of Pope in the Translation of Homer's Odyssey, with Selections from his Works* (London: John Russell Smith, 1855).

40pp. Portrait of the subject.

William Broome (bap. 1689-1745): translator and poet. After studying at Cambridge, Broome published translations of the *Illiad* in Miltonic style. He also collaborated with Alexander Pope, who decided to translate the *Odyssey* after Broome and Elijah Fenton declared a similar intention. Broome translated eight of the books and provided the annotations. Their relationship soured after Pope insufficiently acknowledged Broome's large contribution to the work. Broome continued to publish Greek poetry and translations until his death.

Thomas Worthington Barlow (1824-56): antiquary and naturalist. Barlow was the son of a surgeon. He was called to the bar in 1848, and later worked as a special pleader and conveyancer in Manchester. Barlow, an amateur scientist, was elected a member of the Linnean Society in 1848. Barlow founded the *Cheshire and Lancashire Historic Collector*, which ran from 1853 to 1855. His other works include *Cheshire: its Historical and Literary Association* (1852) and *A Chart of British Ornithology* (1847). Barlow died shortly after beginning his new role as queen's advocate for Sierra Leone in 1856.

The work is a relatively rare, and short, contemporary example of an attempt to rescue a historical subject from obscurity. Barlow laments that Broome has never met with the respect he desire, and condemns local men in particular for this neglect. The purpose of reviving interest in Broome is to add to local fame. Due to the paucity of material found by Barlow, the sketch is as much a biography as an account of the biographer's quest. The biographical sketch itself is 18 pages long.

44.

Gilchrist, Alexander, *Life of William Etty, R.A* (London: David Bogue, 1855), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 367pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: 343pp. Reprinted in 1978.

William Etty (1787-1849): painter. Etty was the son of a baker and miller. He was apprenticed to a printer between 1798 and 1805, and enrolled in the Royal Academy Schools

two years later. At the Academy Etty was influenced by Henry Fuseli and John Flaxman. Etty devoted himself to historical painting and to female nudes. These, including his *Cleopatra* (1816) attracted much scandalized criticism and accusations of indecency.

Alexander Gilchrist (1828-61): biographer. Gilchrist was called to the bar in 1846 but embarked on a literary career instead, together with his wife Anne Gilchrist, writer and author of a biography of Mary Lamb (1883 - see below). Gilchrist published numerous articles in the *Eclectic Review*, including a piece on Etty, which led to a commission from David Bogue to write a full-length biography, published in 1855. The work was enjoyed by Thomas Carlyle, and led to a close friendship between the Gilchrists and Carlyles. Gilchrist's second major work was the first full-length biography of William Blake, though he died of scarlet fever before its completion. The work was finished by Anne Gilchrist, with the help of the Rossetti brothers, and published in 1863 (see below).

Though written in a less intensely personal and rapturous style than the later *Life of William Blake*, the biography is written in a vivid style that some reviewers condemned as Carlylean. The biographer acknowledged the relative absence of incident in the subject's life, but finds the interest of the life elsewhere. Gilchrist paid much attention to the subject's surroundings and provided lengthy descriptions of locations visited by his subject. As with Blake, Gilchrist's first subject had been the focus of controversy, which leads the biographer to defend him from accusations of immodesty by declaring a wholehearted agreement with Etty's artistic vision.

45.

Lewes, George Henry, *The Life and Works of Goethe: with Sketches of his age and contemporaries, from published and unpublished sources* (London: David Nutt, 1855), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 423pp. Portrait of subject. Vol. 2: 464pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1908, 1911, 1924, 1949, 1959, 1965. Lewes also published abridged versions of the biography.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832): writer. Works by the famous German writer include *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), the poetic drama *Faust* (1808) and the novel *Elective Affinities* (1809). Thomas Carlyle, who greatly admired Goethe, translated some of his works into English.

George Henry Lewes (1817-78): writer. Lewes is now principally remembered as George Eliot's companion, but achieved significant success in his own time as a writer on a wide range of subjects. He contributed extensively to the major contemporary periodicals and reviewed some of the period's most important works, from *Oliver Twist* to *Jane Eyre*. Lewes published two novels, a tragedy, and accessible and lively works on natural science (*Sea-Side Studies*, 1858) and philosophers in *A Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845-6), which sold nearly 10,000 copies in its first year of publication.

Lewes's *Life of Goethe* was extremely popular and sold over 1,000 copies in the first three months. When Lewes began the work it was intended as the first biography of Goethe, though two others appeared in the interval. As with many of Lewes's works, the biographer tries to make the author's works accessible, and the work is directed at non-German readers. The biography opens with a Carlylean statement on the value of great men. The ensuing narrative is lively and finds a good balance between analysis of Goethe's works and ideas with more narrowly biographical material, and is erudite without seeming impenetrable.

46.

Baillie, John, *A Memoir of Adelaide Leaper Newton* (London: J. Nisbet, 1856). Second edition.

xvi + 373pp. Portrait of the subject. Frequently reprinted: the 1866 edition is advertised as the fifteenth edition.

Adelaide Leaper Newton (1824-54): Evangelical writer. Now forgotten, Newton was a popular religious writer poet in her time. Her published works include *The Song of Solomon compared with other parts of Scripture* (1850), and the posthumously published *The Heavenly Life* (1856), edited by her biographer Baillie.

John Baillie (1816-90): clergyman and religious writer. Baillie worked as a clergyman for over twenty years, including as rector of Wivenhoe, minister of Fogo and Minister of the Free Church of Scotland. His other biographical work included a memoir of Captain W. Thornton Bate (1859), the missionary Alexander Paterson (1853), sketches in the life of Jesus (1864), and *Life-Studies: or, How to live* (1857). He also published theological reflections such as *An Earnest Ministry: or, How to win Souls. A Tract for the Times* (1857) and *God's Avenger: or, England's Present Duty in India* (1857).

The biography is a poor example of religious biography, cluttered with quotations from the Scriptures, religious texts and sermons, other religious biographies, religious reflections by writers as varied as Henry Martyn and Spenser, fables and abstract theological concepts. The text is replete with quotation marks. There is no sense of narrative progression, but rather biographical elements constantly interrupted by digressions. Despite this, it was extremely successful, frequently reprinted and translated into numerous languages. Abridged versions were distributed by the Edinburgh Religious Tract Society for poorer readers.

47.

Williams, John de Kewer, *The Minister's Wife and My Own, What I Think of Her, and What Others Think: A Memoir of Mrs. J. de Kewer Williams* (London: W. & F. G. Cash, 1856).

152pp.

Mrs. J. de Kewer Williams [*née* Charlotte C. Smales] (?-1855): clergyman's wife. Williams married her future biographer in July 1850, in Brighton, and the couple were married for thirty years. The couple lived a pious life in England, interspersed with trips to the Continent.

Reverend John de Kewer Williams (1817-95): Congregationalist minister. Williams initially trained to become a surgeon, but discovered his religious vocation instead. His work included pastorates at Tottenham and Edmonton and in Ireland at Limerick. He was principally known as minister of Old Gravel Chapel in Hackney, where he worked for twenty years. Williams also collected rare books and paintings, including a precious Rembrandt, and also an extremely large collection of Cromwellian material.

The work is a poor example of religious biography, in which the language is so cluttered with scriptural references that the sense and facts are hard to make out. The narrative is above all an account of the couple's marriage and a lengthy praise of the biographer's wife. The biographer rather oddly presents himself as a disagreeable, cross-tempered man. The biography ends with messages of comfort from the subject's friends to her husband.

48.

Gaskell, Elizabeth, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1857), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 352pp + Vol. 2: 327pp. Reprinted in 1858, 1859, 1860, 1873, 1879, 1882, 1895, 1900, 1901, 1905, 1908, 1911, 1913, 1919, 1920, 1929, 1947, 1951, 1958, 1961, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1975, 1978, 1996 and 1997.

Charlotte Brontë [*married name* Nicholls] (1816-55): novelist. Brontë is the famous author of the popular but controversial novels *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, *Villette* and *The Professor*. Brontë suffered the loss of her sisters Maria (1814-25), Elizabeth (1815-25), Emily (1818-48), and Anne (1820-49), and her brother Branwell (1817-48). She died shortly after marrying Arthur Bell Nicholls (1818-1906).

Elizabeth Gaskell [*née* Stevenson] (1810-65): novelist. Gaskell was primarily known as a short story writer and novelist, for works such as *Cranford*, which began to appear in 1851, and *Mary Barton* (1848), which uses a quotation from Thomas Carlyle as an epigraph. Though she later considered writing a biography of Madame de Staël, this was Gaskell's only biography.

This is the first full-length biography of Brontë, and the Victorian biography most frequently reprinted today. It is of seminal importance as the first biography of a female writer by another. Its importance was immediately sensed by its first readers, who admired (or, in some cases, were unsettled by) the novelistic detail and vividness of the language, were moved by the insistent (and some would argue, morbid) pathos of the life and the apparent self-sacrificing nature of its subject. Though Gaskell remained silent concerning Brontë's passion for Monsieur Héger, the work attracted great controversy through its libellous portrayal of Branwell Brontë's affair with a barely disguised married woman and its identification of Cowan Bridge as the original of Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. A revised edition was soon printed. Gaskell's decision 'to honour her as a woman, separate from her character of authoress' has prompted widely divergent feminist criticism.

49.

Murray, Patrick Joseph, *The Life of John Banim, The Irish Novelist, Author of "Damon and Pythias" &c. And One of the Writers of "Tales by the O'Hara Family", with extracts from his correspondence, General and Literary* (London: William Lay, 1857).

334 pp. An 1869 edition is advertised as the tenth edition.

John Banim [*pseudo.* Abel O'Hara] (1798-1842): dramatist, novelist and poet. Banim was the son of a gun and tackle shop owner and Catholic family. He demonstrated some ability in painting and enrolled in the Royal Dublin Society drawing academy in 1813 where he was successful. He began to teach drawing. After the death of a pupil with whom he had fallen in love, he turned his attention to literature and began to publish articles in magazines. Banim went on to publish a number of plays and novels that describe Irish life and characters. His *Tales by the O'Hara Family*, co-written with his brother Michael (1796-1874) and published between 1825 and 1827, were extremely popular. He also found success with his plays, including *Damon and Pythias*, which was performed in London in 1821.

Patrick Joseph Murray (fl. 1857). This appears to be Murray's only publication.

The biography is interesting for its lengthy consideration of the literary character and fame and the 'martyrs of genius', with references to Thomas Churchyard, Thomas Chatterton, Kirke White, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Southey. Murray begins by considering the notion, false in his view, that literary lives are devoid of incident; the literary life, for Murray, is principally one of woes. There is also a desire to engage with the generic nature of biography (with a reference to Samuel Johnson), even though the biographer considers the genre inferior

to autobiography. The work has a decided patriotic element as the biographer seeks to celebrate an Irish talent, and depicts him as the 'Irish Scott' and 'bright-hearted, true-souled Irishman'.

50.

Smiles, Samuel, *The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer* (London: John Murray, 1857).

xvi + 517pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1858, 1868, 1881, 1903, 1971, Abridged editions were also published.

George Stephenson (1781-1848): railway engineer. Stephenson, famously, built the first public railway line using steam locomotives. He was the son of illiterate parents, and his rise to fame and fortune was emblematic for many Victorians of the rewards of self-help and determination.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper *Leeds Times*, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson. Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2 – see below), and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859 – see below), a work that was founded on the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see below) and Robert Dick (1878 – see below).

The biography was a bestseller and remained in print during Smiles's lifetime, with cheaper editions published for less wealthy readers. The work is well researched and engaging and, though it contains what became known as the typical Smilesian values of perseverance and self-control, the didactic element does not overburden the narrative. The work was important in developing the genre of industrial and business biography and promoting a new type of biographical hero, distinct from literary and artistic heroes, warriors and monarchs.

51.

Brock, Rev. William, *A Biographical Sketch of Sir Henry Havelock, K.C.B* (London: James Nisbet, 1858).

302pp. Portrait of subject. The work went through at least eight editions in 1858.

Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857): army officer. Havelock, the son of a shipbuilder and ship owner, was given a strict religious upbringing. Following a decline in his family's fortunes, he was unable to pursue his legal studies and joined the army instead. He became second lieutenant in 1815. He studied Hindustani and Persian with a view to serving in India and joined the 13th foot Somerset light infantry before leaving for India in 1823. Havelock maintained his strong faith and in India built close ties with Bishop Heber. Havelock distinguished himself in India, and his soldiers became known as 'Havelock's saints'. He was repeatedly promoted and fought in some of the most notorious battles in India. In 1857, he was ordered to relieve Cawnpore where the garrison was besieged, and to relieve Sir Henry

Lawrence, besieged at Lucknow. Havelock and his men arrived to witness the result of the Cawnpore massacre. Havelock pushed on to Lucknow, where he died.

Reverend William Brock (1807-75): Baptist minister and biographer. Brock was the son of a Devonshire ironmonger. From 1820 to 1827 he was apprenticed to a watchmaker, before working as a journeyman watchmaker. He became increasingly religious and was baptized in 1829, before studying theology. He led the congregation of St. Mary's Baptist Church in Norwich in 1833. From 1848, he helped to build the Bloomsbury Chapel and stayed there for over twenty years. Brock became president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1869. His career was tumultuous, as he entered into controversies regarding open communion, which he supported. He published the life of Havelock despite his membership of the Peace Society and strong opposition to the Crimean War. He also published numerous sermons and lectures.

Despite its title, this 'sketch' is as detailed and lengthy as many contemporary full-length biographies. The biographer introduces his work as a response to growing public demand, which places the biographical genre in an unusually direct commercial light. The work can be usefully compared with Marshman's 1860 biography of Havelock (see below), all the more so since Brock compares his abilities as a biographer with Marshman's, and concedes Marshman's greater knowledge of oriental affairs and the subject himself. In contrast with Marshman's more military-concerned work, Brock focused on the religious dimension of Havelock's life. Brock draws on and extends the idea of muscular Christianity and Christian heroism, and is keen to prove that many disciples of Christ issued from the army. This representation of the Christian soldier proved somewhat controversial. The 'idolatry' of Indians is condemned in robust terms that make for unpleasant reading.

52.

Carlyle, Thomas, *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858-65), 6 vols.

Vol. 1: viii + 634pp. Published in 1858. The front page announces that the work will be completed in 4 volumes. Covers the years 1712-26. Vol. 2: vii + 712pp. Published in 1858. The front page continues to announce 4 volumes. Covers the years 1727-40. Vol. 3: x + 770pp. Portrait of the subject. Published in 1862. Covers the years 1740-44. Vol. 4: vii + 631pp. Published in 1864. Covers the years 1744-57. Vol. 5: viii + 639pp. Portrait of the subject. Published in 1865. Covers the years 1757-60. Vol. 6: viii + 781pp. Portrait of the subject. Published in 1865. Covers the years 1760-86. The work was reprinted in 7 volumes in 1869, and in 6 volumes in 1886, 1894, 1897-8. Numerous greatly abridged versions were also published.

Frederick II of Prussia (1712-1786): monarch. Frederick was the King of Prussia between 1740 until his death in 1786, and prince-elector of the Holy Roman Empire. His legacy is still disputed: he has been both condemned as a despot and originator of German nationalism, but also praised as a patron of the arts.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): essayist, historian and biographer. Carlyle was perhaps the pre-eminent influence on both Victorian biographies of 'great' lives and the lives of 'obscure' subjects. His own biographies were the life of Schiller (1823-4), a series of biographical lectures on *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841 – see above), and the *Life of John Sterling* (1851 – see above). His essays on biography and history were also extremely important for later biographers.

Carlyle began work for the biography as early as 1851. He drew on his profound knowledge of German literature and culture for the work, and visited Germany to pursue his research. The project proved an overwhelming one, and Carlyle often felt crushed by it. The

work exemplifies the virtues frequently praised by Carlyle in his other publications, including courage, a passion for work, and authority. Critics were united in their praise, and reviews confirmed Carlyle's status as a, and perhaps the, leading literary figure of the age.

53.

Hankin, Christiana C., *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, Author of 'Select Memoirs of Port Royal' and other works* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 2 vols. Second edition.

Vol. 2: 548 pp. Reprinted in 1859 and 1860.

Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck [*née* Galton] (1778-1856): author. Schimmelpenninck was acquainted with eminent members of the Society of Friends in her childhood. Mary Galton married the Dutch tradesman Lambert Schimmelpenninck (c.1766-1840) in 1806. She began to write following her husband's financial difficulties, and found success in 1813 with a compilation of writings on Port-Royalists based on works sent to her by Hannah More. Further works on this subject led to the *Select Memoirs of Port Royal* (1829). She also published on history, aesthetics and religion. She went through modifications of religious belief through her life, and died a Moravian.

Christiana C. Hankin (fl. 1859-9). Little is known of Hankin, a relative of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, who also edited Schimmelpenninck's *The Principles of Beauty* in 1859.

The first volume of this work is Schimmelpenninck's autobiography, which is strikingly vivid and powerful, and is where the value of the work lies. The second volume is the biography, and is overall less successful, and heavily dependent upon the subject's journal entries and letters. The relative calm of the subject's life is stressed. The biographer grants her subject great intellectual achievements and narrates her success without qualifications, though the subject is also rendered less 'problematic' as a female writer through her own, and the biographer's, statements on female modesty and propriety.

54.

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson, *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: xxxii + 479pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: 557pp. Reprinted in 1906 and 1933.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822): poet. Shelley, expelled from Oxford in 1811 for circulating *The Necessity of Atheism*, went on to publish works such as *Queen Mab* (1813), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).

Thomas Jefferson Hogg (1792-1862): biographer. Hogg first met Shelley at Oxford in 1810. They became close friends. He was expelled with Shelley for his refusal to divulge the author of *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) – for which Hogg had prepared arguments and worked on a draft. Hogg held unreciprocated affection for Shelley's wife Harriet, which eventually led to a rupture in their relationship, though Shelley and Hogg later resumed their friendship. Hogg pursued legal studies and was called to the bar in 1817, and worked as a lawyer while adding to his income by publishing articles.

The work is of interest as one of the principal controversial biographies published during the Victorian period. The biography was commissioned by Sir Percy and Lady Jane Shelley. Hogg drew much of the work from his personal reminiscences, letters and journals. Though the work was lively, Hogg's family was shocked by the overly frank portrayal of Shelley and, with justification, Hogg's numerous inventions, distortions and manipulations of both Shelley's personal manuscripts and indeed his own. Shelley is depicted as a weak character dependent on Hogg. Moreover, the work avoids critical discussions of the subject's

poetry. The family attempted to prevent Hogg from publishing further volumes. Though four volumes were announced, only two volumes of the biography were published.

55.

[Anonymous], *The Struggles of a Young Artist: Being a Memoir of David C. Gibson, By a Brother Artist* (London: James Nisbet, 1858).

184pp. Portrait of the subject.

David Cooke Gibson (1827-1856): painter. Gibson was the son of a Scottish miniaturist and engraver who taught him art. After his father's death he supported the family and earned money by painting portraits. He travelled in France and Belgium to study art, and became increasingly interested in the Pre-Raphaelites. His most significant painting is *The Little Stranger* (1855). A number of his works were exhibited at the Royal Academy. He died of a broken blood vessel, having suffered from consumption for some time.

William MacDuff (1824-81): artist. Macduff was a minor Victorian realist painter, whose works include 'An Auction on the Village' and 'Lost and Found'. Images of his works are collected in *Artis farrago. Illustrations of human life from pictures by Wm. Macduff* (1870).

The biography is a bildungsroman-type account of an artist who battled his romantic longings, and 'struggle' is recurrent word. MacDuff moves from Gibson's boyhood, through 'early struggles' and 'disappointments' to 'brightening prospects', and, rapidly, his 'last illness and death'. The biographer draws on fictional techniques such as direct speech to enliven the narrative, though the language is overall somewhat simplistic and at times cloying. The biographer appeals to the reader to imagine certain scenes and emotions seek to increase the immediacy of the narrative. There is evidence of the influence of Carlyle's *The Life of Sterling* (1851 – see above), with the work's tragic overtones, the use of exclamations such as 'Alas!' to punctuate the narrative, and reflections on the age. The biographer is far more pious than Carlyle, however, and regrets the subject's disregard for the Bible.

56.

Seddon, John P., *Memoir and Letters of the late Thomas Seddon, Artist. By his Brother* (London: James Nisbet, 1858).

208pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1972.

Thomas Seddon (1821-56): landscape painter. Seddon was the son of a cabinet manufacturer and he joined his father's work in London. After a brief stay in Paris to study ornamental art, he designed furniture for his father's firm. He formed an acquaintance with Ford Madox Brown, who was a strong influence on him, and became friends with William Holman Hunt. He began to paint landscapes, some of which were exhibited at the Royal Academy. Seddon travelled to Egypt in 1853 and, with Hunt, explored the region and visited Jerusalem and Syria. On his return, he produced numerous orientalist works. Over a hundred of his works were exhibited after his death at the Society of Arts (1857), inaugurated by John Ruskin.

John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906): architect. He joined the Architectural Association as a founding member in 1847. Seddon was deeply influenced by John Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and became a champion of Gothic art. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1860 and acted as secretary between 1862 and 1871. His designs include University College, Aberystwyth (1864-86), and numerous churches. He published *Progress in Art and Architecture with Precedents for Ornament* (1852) and *Rambles in the Rhine Provinces* (1867). He was the elder brother of Thomas Seddon.

The biographer is uncertain of his role and describes himself as an 'editor' who has linked together autobiographical material, and indeed the biographer makes much of the subject's letters. Nevertheless, the work opens with a reflection on biographical trends, and the statement that the current fashion for biographies of Christian heroism and enterprise (likely references to biography of Havelock (1858 – see above) and Smilesian biography) has crowded out lives of small, unobtrusive lives such as Seddon's. Seddon goes on to praise biographies of 'common life' and turns away readers expecting a biography of the hero-worshipping kind. Also of interest in the work are the parallels drawn between biography and painting. The biographical sketch is 173pp long, and is followed by 'Reminiscences of Eastern Travel: A Lecture by Thomas Seddon'.

57.

Trelawny, E. J., *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858).

304pp. Portrait of subject.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) poet. Shelley, expelled from Oxford in 1811 for circulating *The Necessity of Atheism*, went on to publish works such as *Queen Mab* (1813), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). George Gordon Byron, sixth baron (1788-1824): poet. Byron became embroiled in public controversy from the publication of his first volume of poems, *Hours of Idleness* (1807), which was attacked, and his satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). Byron rose to great fame for his dissolute lifestyle and for works that include *Childe Harold* (1809), *The Corsair* (1813) and *Don Juan* (1819-20).

Edward John Trelawny (1792-1881): writer and adventurer. Trelawny joined the navy at the age of thirteen, travelled extensively, and worked as a midshipman until being dismissed for injury in 1812. He married Caroline Julia Addison in 1813 and the couple were involved in a public and painful divorce four years later following her adultery. Trelawny met Shelley and Byron in Pisa in 1822 and they became close friends. Trelawny accompanied Byron to Greece in 1823. He published the autobiographical *Adventures of a Younger Son*, in 1831.

The work is a combination of biography and autobiographical reminiscence. Trelawny builds the work on notes he made when Shelley and Byron were alive. The biography opens with a quotation from Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* on the jury who determines a poet's fame, and Trelawny maintains the theme of posthumous fame and the discovery of poets by beginning the work with an account of his own discovery of Shelley's works. There is an extensive use of direct speech, which lends the work a lively, albeit novelistic, quality. The work was revised and published in 1878 as *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*. The many alterations between the two (notably with regards to Byron's physical deformities) suggest that both works are to be read cautiously.

58.

Windle, Rev. Samuel Allen, *The Christian workman; Being a memoir of John Bentley* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, & Hunt, 1858).

70pp.

John Bentley (1786-?): pious miner. Bentley was born in the small village of Snelstone, where he soon began to work as a miner. In his youth, he was involved in an accident in a coal shaft but escaped. As a result of his escape, he became intensely Christian and pious, and enjoined his fellow workers to follow his example.

Reverend Samuel Allen Windle (d.1880): clergyman. Windle was the Vicar of Mayfield, and later the Vicar at Mark Rasen, Lincolnshire. He married Sydney Katherine Coghill in 1854. He published a short account of a Derbyshire apprentice in 1860 and lectures on the Canticles, and sermons.

The work is dedicated 'To the Working Men of England'. The biographer presents himself as the friend of the working classes, and explicitly offers his own work in opposition to contemporary biographies of eminent men who seemed so distant from the poorer individuals of society. This manifesto is disappointingly followed by a call to the working classes to follow a Christian life, and the ensuing sketch is no more representative of working-class life than biographies of 'Great Lives'. The sketch reads like an oral account delivered from the pulpit, in which brief episodes in a Christian life are recounted.

59.

[Anonymous], *Women of Worth* (London: James Hogg and Son, 1859).

vi + 279 pp.

Collective biography: Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Fry, Sarah Martin, Margaret Mercer, Sarah Boardman Judson, Rachel (Lady Russell), Ann Harrison (Lady Fanshawe), Lucy Hutchinson, Isabel the Catholic, Lady Jane Grey, Maria Theresa, Madeleine Salome Oberlin, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Suzanne Curchord (Madame Necker), Caroline Lucretia Herschel, Hannah More, Mrs Wordsworth, Ann Flaxman, Lady Warwick, Lady Mackintosh and Lady Somerville.

The biographer has not been identified.

This is one of the more interesting examples of Victorian collective biography. The virtues lauded are traditional female domestic virtues, yet this is framed by an introduction quoting (uncredited) George Eliot on the poetry of everyday life in *Adam Bede*. The work also reveals the difficulty of gathering sufficient information regarding obscure women – many of the sketches assume what the life of the subject must have been like from the life of her husband.

60.

Brightwell, Cecilia Lucy, *Heroes of the Laboratory and the Workshop* (London: Routledge, Warnes & Routledge, 1859).

xii + 222pp.

Collective biography: Richard Arkwright, Claude Louis Berthollet, James Brindley, William Caxton, Benvenuto Cellini, Sir Humphry Davy, Sebastian Erard, Claude Montal, Graham Breguet, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Quintin Matsys, Joseph Jacquard, Richard Lenoir, Oberkampf, Calico, Bernard Pallisy, John Rennie, Jacques Roubo, Alois Sennefelder, George Stephenson, Vaucanson, Josiah Wedgwood, Rennequin, Laurens, Harrison, Gobelin, Bezaleel, Hiram and Paul.

Cecilia Lucy Brightwell (1811-75): writer and etcher. Brightwell was born into a nonconformist family near Norwich, and was the daughter of a solicitor and amateur microscopist. She wrote over twenty works, principally biographical, and most of which are preoccupied with religious and moral guidance. Her most important work is *Memorials of Amelie Opie* (1854). She also attracted notoriety for her skilful etchings, including a striking copy of Rembrandt's *Landscape with a Cottage and Hay Barn, 1641*.

The sketches are conventional in their emphasis on moral guidance. The main interest of the work is its preface, in which the author describes her encounter with an artisan. The meeting between individuals from two social classes is described in strikingly intense and physical terms. The Preface stresses the need for empathy for the working classes, and notes

the lack of readable auto/biographies produced from amongst them. The book is addressed to both working men (who might be inspired by tales of men 'of their own class') and more educated readers. The biography echoes Smiles's *Self-Help* (published the same year), though it contains a stronger emphasis on religion and piety than Smiles's work.

61.

Ellis, Mrs, *The Mothers of Great Men* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859).

418 pp. Reprinted in 1874 and 1883.

Collective biography: the mothers of St. Augustine, Alfred the Great, Henry VII, Francis I, Henry IV, John Wesley, Napoleon, Cowper, Lord Byron, Goethe, Richter and some 'Brief Notices'.

Sarah Ellis [*née* Stickney] (1799-1872): writer. Stickney was the daughter of a Quaker farmer. Her education was wide-ranging and unconventional. Ellis began to publish when she found herself in financial difficulties. Her works include domestic and didactic fiction, conduct-books, household management works and travel writing, together with some poetry. She was also an educationalist, and opened a non-denominational school for girls. Ellis wrote a number of collective biographies, including *The Women of England* (1839), *The Daughters of England* (1842) and *The Wives of England* (1843).

The work attempts to demonstrate the crucial influence of a mother, for better or for worse, on her children. Ellis largely endorsed the 'separate spheres' ideology, which this work appears to illustrate, though ambiguously, as women are accorded a determining role in 'Great' men's lives. The introduction reveals that, having decided on the theme of the work, the biographer was somewhat hampered by the lack of available information, which prompts a reflection on the difficulty of recuperating obscured female lives. The biography echoes the theme of *A Book for Mothers: or, Biographic Sketches of the Mothers of Great and Good Men*, published by Charlotte Eliza Sargeant in 1850.

62.

Gregory, Benjamin, *Memoir of Emma Tatham* (London: Hamilton and Co., 1859).

192 pp.

Emma Tatham (1829-55): poet. Tatham was the only surviving child of George (an upholsterer) and Ann Tatham, who lived in London. She was a precocious child, and had versified the books of Job and Jonah by the age of seven. She experienced a religious crisis in 1846. A volume of her poetry appeared in 1854, *The Dream of Pythagoras and other poems*, achieved some success amongst religious circles, and was reprinted in 1872 and 1890. Tatham suffered from a delicate constitution, and she experienced bouts of depression throughout her short life.

Reverend Benjamin Gregory (fl. 1859-1903): clergyman and religious writer. Gregory, a London minister, published numerous religious biographies including lives of Walter Powell (1871), Francis Athon West (1873), Benjamin Gregory (1885) and Samuel Bradburn (1895). He also published religious histories and reflections, such as *Side Lights on the conflicts of Methodism* (1898). Gregory was Emma Tatham's minister and remained a close friend until her early death.

The biography is heavily religious and biblical in language. Due to the shortness of the life and lack of events, the work progresses thematically more than chronologically. Despite the unpretending nature of the work, it contains an interesting reflection on religious melancholy and female depression. The biography is one of the rare works on lesser known female writers to unabashedly declare the subject to be a genius, and the depiction of her literary work draws heavily on Romantic images of creativity.

63.

Hood, Edwin Paxton, *The Peerage of Poverty: Or, Learners and Workers in Fields, Farms, and Factories* (London: Judd & Glass, 1859). Third edition.

viii + 235pp. Reprinted in 1861 and 1870.

Collective biography: sketches of a wide range of subjects, both known (such as Humphry Davy) and obscure (such as 'a blacksmith mathematician'). Five subjects, 'Cedmon the Ploughman', 'Palissy the Potter', 'Nathanael Bowditch', 'Robert Nicoli, the Kind Herder' and 'John Clare, the Peasant Poet' are given entire chapters.

Edwin Paxton Hood (1820-85): writer, Congregational minister and temperance worker. Hood, who attended the 1848 Paris peace conference as a delegate, often included controversial political elements in his preaching. His congregation included both middle-class and working-class men and women. His writings are diverse, and encompass analyses of the age, such as *The Age and its Architects* (1852), hymns, collective biographies and temperance works. He also edited the *Eclectic Review*, championed Robert Browning's poetry, and published a study of Thomas Carlyle: *Thomas Carlyle, philosophic thinker, theologian, historian and poet* (1875).

As with Hood's other works of collective biography celebrating labour from humble life, the sketches are interspersed with enthusiastic praises of the idea of labour ('Labour and Poetry!') and Hood returns to the idea that the educated classes know too little about their social inferiors. The work is aimed at both the educated and the more humble, who may derive inspiration from it. Hood's work is carefully written and unusually democratic, though his positive interpretations of poverty often seem naïve.

64.

Masson, David, *The Life of John Milton: narrated in connexion with the political, ecclesiastical, and literary history of his time* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1859-80), 6 vols.

Vol. 1. Xiv + 780pp. Portrait of the subject. Covers the years 1608-39. Published in 1859. Vol. 2. Xii + 608pp. Covers the years 1638-43. Published in 1871. Vol. 3: ix + 729pp. Covers the years 1643-49. Published in 1873. Vol. 4: xiii + 642pp. Covers the years 1649-54. Published in 1877. Vol. 5: xv + 707pp. Covers the years 1654-60. Published in 1877. Vol. 6.: xix + 840pp. Portrait of the subject. Covers the years 1660-74. Published in 1880. Reprinted in 1873-94.

John Milton (1608-74): poet. Milton published *Paradise Lost* in 1667, and significant poetic works together with essays and reflections on republican themes.

David Masson (1822-1907): biographer and scholar. Masson was the son of a Scottish stonecutter and received a bursary to study in Aberdeen. He decided against a career as a clergyman and embarked upon literary work and edited *The Banner*. During travels to Scotland he encountered the Carlyles and John Stuart Mill, and they became close friends. He began to publish extensively for W. and R. Chambers, including histories of Greece and Rome (1845, 1848). He moved to London in 1847 and met some of the key literary figures of the period. He followed Arthur Hugh Clough as professor of English at UCL in 1852 and became professor of rhetoric and English at Edinburgh University in 1865. Other important biographical and critical work include *Essays, Biographical and Critical: Chiefly on English Poets* (1856), *British Novelists and their styles* (1859), a life of Drummond of Hawthornden (1873) and lives of the Romantic poets. He published a collection of lectures on Carlyle in 1885.

Despite the excessive length of the biography, the work was important in championing an increase in scholarly standards for biographical writing, and for developing the idea of the 'Life and Times' biography in a more academic manner. Masson sought to expand the boundaries of biography by interweaving life-writing with a history of the period. The alternation between the two was criticised by a number of reviewers. The work is erudite but over-dense in its consideration of the political, ecclesiastical, literary and philosophical ideas that circulated during Milton's lifetime.

65.

Smiles, Samuel, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859).

343 pp. Frequently reprinted, including in 1860, 1862, 1866, 1879, 1891, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1905, 1908, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1958, 1968, 1986, 1996 and 2002.

Collective biography: well over one hundred subjects are discussed.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper *Leeds Times*, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson in 1857 (see above). Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2 – see below), and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859). Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see below) and Robert Dick (1878 – see below).

Self-Help grew out of the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles adapted the lessons on perseverance circulated by didactic writers such as George Lillie Craik for a later audience by including more industrial and business subjects that appealed to a wider readership, and wrote the biography in a livelier and more engaging style. Despite the immense success of the work, Smiles was criticised for advocating shallow and socially transgressive ambitions, accusations that he sharply rejected. The work was translated into numerous languages.

66.

Thomson, Mrs, *Celebrated Friendships* (London: James Hogg and Sons, 1859), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 376pp. Vol. 2: 346pp.

Collective biography: John Evelyn and Robert Boyle, Henry Howard (Early of Surrey) and Sir Thomas Wyatt, William Cowper and Mary Unwin, Marie Antoinette and the Princesse de Lamballe, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, Magdalen Herbert and Dr Donne, Sir Kenelm Digby and Sir Anthony Van Dyck, Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Fulke Grevil, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charles Lamb, Fenelon and Madame Guyon, Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Talbot, Henry St John (Lord Bolingbroke) and Alexander Pope, David Garrick and Mrs Clive, Edward Hyde (Earl of Clarendon) and Lucius Cary (Viscount Falkland), Frances (Countess of Hertford) and Henrietta Louisa (Countess of Pomfret).

Katherine Thomson [*née* Byerley, *pseudo* Grace Wharton] (1797-1862): biographer and novelist. Thomson was born into a well-connected family and met influential men in her

childhood, including Coleridge. From the age of fourteen she worked as an assistant teacher at her sisters' school. She married the physician Anthony Todd Thomson (1778-1849) in 1820, and the couple moved within a lively literary and artistic circle. Her other biographical works include a biography of Wolsey in 1824 for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, *Memoirs of the Court of Henry VIII* (1826) and *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Raleigh* (1830) and *Memoirs of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough* (1839). She also published a semi-autobiographical domestic novel, *Constance*, in 1833.

The preface interestingly sets out Thomson's plans for revising the generic boundaries of biography. The life of each subject is conveyed not through comprehensive sketches but fragments and details, and Thomson declares her interest in 'those small facts of which life is made up'. Political and historical events and even literary productions are sidelined in favour of an analysis of private life and private emotions. Thomson applies ideas usually associated with biographies of women to a wider range of subjects and questions the relationship between biography and the public. The sketches themselves are lively and readable.

67.

[Anonymous], *Memoirs of William Beckford, of Fonthill, Author of 'Vathek'* (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1859), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 352pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: 402pp.

William Beckford (1759-1844): writer and politician. Beckford was the son of a lord mayor of London. A man of wealth, he acquired vast collections of paintings and curiosities during his lifetime, and accumulated them in the Gothic Fonthill Abbey, where here lived a solitary life between 1796 and 1822. His debts led him to abandon the home. Beckford's most famous work is *Vathek*, an Oriental tale published in 1786, and which became highly successful.

Cyrus Redding (1785-1870): journalist. Redding was the son of a Baptist minister, and he formed a friendship with the missionary Henry Martyn in his childhood. He embarked on a journalistic career, and worked on *The Pilot*, the *Plymouth* and the *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*, which he founded in 1810. Redding travelled to Paris and acted as correspondent for the *Examiner*. He also published a wide variety of works, including the popular *History and Description of Modern Wines* in 1833, which was frequently reprinted, and travel books, poems, fiction and memoirs. He published his memoirs, *Fifty Years' Recollections, Literary and Personal, with Observations on Men and Things*, in 1858.

The biographer perceives the subject as on the brink of oblivion and resorts to biography to delay what he deems an inevitable neglect. The biographer, unsure of the public interest in his subject, describes himself as an 'editor', though the work includes significant analyses by the biographer, and there is a better balance between extracts from letters and the biographer's narrative than in most biographies of the time. There is some use of direct speech in attempt to enliven the work. The work is interestingly poised between two ideas of biographical writing, one that is scholarly and factual, and one that is drawn to the artistic capacities of the genre. The biography does not end with the subject's death, but with Beckford delivering a parting jest, which is a very unusual ending to a nineteenth-century biography.

68.

[Johnson, Joseph], *Heroines of our Time: Being Sketches of the Lives of Eminent Women, with examples of their benevolent works, truthful lives, and noble deeds* (London: Darton and Co., 1860).

263 pp.

Collective biography: Florence Nightingale, Mary L. Ware, Miss Marsh, Mrs Sherman, Charlotte Brontë, Margaret Fuller, Mrs Fry, Mrs Sherwood, Mrs Hannah More, Pocahontas, Lydia Sellon and Elizabeth Blackwell.

Joseph Johnson (fl. 1860-83): biographer. Johnson's other works include *Famous Boys; and how they became great men* (1860), *Clever Girls of our Time, and how they became famous women* (1863) and *The Interviews of Great Men* (1862).

This collective biography works on the premise that 'ministering is woman's vocation'. It hopes to stimulate its readers assumed to be living a life of leisure and ease into good deeds. The work is otherwise unremarkable.

69.

Marshman, John Clark, *Memoirs of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock, KCB* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860).

x + 462pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1861, 1870, 1876, 1878, 1890 and 1909.

Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857): army officer. Havelock, the son of a shipbuilder and shipowner, was given a strict religious upbringing. Following a decline in his family's fortunes, he was unable to pursue his legal studies and joined the army instead. He became second lieutenant in 1815. He studied Hindustani and Persian with a view to serving in India and joined the 13th foot Somerset light infantry before leaving for India in 1823. Havelock maintained his strong faith and in India built close ties with Bishop Heber. Havelock distinguished himself in India, and his soldiers became known as 'Havelock's saints'. He was regularly promoted and fought in some of the most notorious battles in India. In 1857, he was ordered to relieve Cawnpore where the garrison was besieged, and to relieve Sir Henry Lawrence, besieged at Lucknow. They arrived to witness the result of the Cawnpore massacre. Havelock pushed on to Lucknow, where he died.

John Clark Marshman (1794-1877): journalist and historian. Marshman was the son of Baptist missionaries, and he spent much of his childhood in India. As he grew older, he played an increasing part in managing the business of the Serampore mission, and managed the press and paper-mill there. He founded and edited the first newspaper in Bengali, the *Sumachar Durpun*, in 1818, published an English-Bengali dictionary (1828) and the first history of Bengal in 1848. He also founded the *Friend of India* in 1818 with his father, and it later became *The Statesman*. He eventually acted as official Bengali translator, publishing numerous articles and promoted Indian economic development. Marshman's other works included the significant *Guide to the Civil Law* (1845-6). Marshman was Havelock's brother-in-law.

The work is a sophisticated and well-written example of Victorian biography. The structure of the work is fairly traditional, and moves from Havelock's childhood and education, and ends with a summary of the subject's personal characteristics. Marshman explains military manoeuvres in accessible terms. The biographer's own narrative is carefully controlled, and rises to an emotional pitch when describing the Cawnpore massacre. The patriotic dimension of the work is important, and Marshman works hard to consecrate his subject as a national hero, 'one of England's noblest dead'. Intriguingly, Marshman explicitly defines his subject in Carlylean terms by describing him as an example of Carlyle's 'earnest' man.

70.

E. H., *A Brief memorial of Mrs. Wright, late of Buxton, Norfolk* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1861).

16pp.

Anne Wright (fl. 1853): biblical scholar. After having married John Wright, Esq., in 1816, Mrs. Wright studied the Scriptures in detail and published an explanation of the Old Testament sacrifices in 1849. She combined this biblical knowledge with a strong interest in natural history. She imparted her knowledge to schoolchildren by correspondence, and published the letters as *The Observing Eye*, which was read by the Queen and reviewed by Hugh Miller.

The identity of E.H. is unknown. A number of anonymous writers signed themselves 'E.H.' during this period, but it is possible that this was also the author of sermons gathered from the writings of John Keble (1882) and Edward Bouverie Pusey (1884), together with other short religious works.

The principal interest of this short biographical sketch is the preface that argues that biographical works are justified by being Godly works. The biographer avoids dwelling on the subject's private life but focuses instead on her philanthropic endeavours.

71.

Hill, Matthew Davenport, *Our Exemplars: Poor and Rich; Or, Biographical Sketches of Men and Women who have, by an extraordinary use of their opportunities, benefited their fellow-creatures* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1861).

342 pp. Reprinted in 1880.

Collective biography: the Earl of Shaftesbury, Jacques Jasmin, John Bunyan, the King of Portugal, Bridget Burke, Sister Nathalie, Rosa Governo, Françoise Caysac, Louisa Schepler, Christopher Thomson, William and Robert Chambers, Joseph Tuckerman, Father Matthew, Rev. Dr Spratt, Dr. John Thomson, Harriet Ryan, Captain Maconochie, Catherine Wilkinson, John Smeaton, Frederic Auguste Demetz, Vicomte Bretignières de Courteilles, Paul Louis Verdier, Sarah P. Remond, John Plummer, Sarah Martin, Sir Rowland Hill, Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and Lay Noel Byron.

Matthew Davenport Hill (1792-1872): writer and penal reformer. Hill was born in Birmingham, and combined a career in literature, law, and government as a Liberal. He served as MP for Hull from 1832 to 1835, but his parliamentary career was ended after her made a false allegation against an Irish MP. His numerous papers on penal reforms and the treatment of criminals nevertheless led to significant reforms. His other official positions included acting as commissioner of the Bristol and district court of bankruptcy, 1851-69, and extensive temperance campaigning. He promoted the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge from its inception to its closure and originated the popular *Penny Magazine*.

The work is one of the most interesting of nineteenth century collective biographies. The subjects are unusual and varied, drawn from all social groups, and an international rather than a national or patriotic emphasis is favoured. The biography is prefaced by Lord Brougham, who comments on self-help literature and notes that the works by G. L. Craik (1830-1 – see above) and Samuel Smiles (1859 – see above) tended to exclude women and were mostly concerned with men who achieved some measure of fame after overcoming their difficulties. Brougham is interested in lives that never achieved any renown. Davenport adds further reservations regarding Smiles's work. The sketches themselves are fairly traditional, and move swiftly over facts in order to concentrate on arresting anecdotes. The work is interesting in the range of narratives it uses to celebrate hidden lives, from oral stories and folktales to poetry.

72.

Morgan, Richard Cope, *The Life of Richard Weaver, the converted collier* (London: Morgan & Chase, 1861).

iv + 122 pp. Portrait of the subject. The work was reprinted in 1906.

Richard Weaver (1827-?): religious collier. Weaver was born in the village of Asterley, near Shrewsbury, the son of a drinking farm-labourer and a pious mother. He was one of four children, one of whom worked as a collier and another as a Primitive Methodist local preacher. Another brother was killed in a colliery accident, and Richard himself narrowly escaped from an accident. He lived an irreligious life, and drank heavily, until he was struck one night by the sight of his mother praying for him to be saved. He was converted in 1852, and joined the Wesleyan society at Openshaw, near Manchester. He was married in 1853 to a woman who had also converted earlier. Richard began to preach and was known locally as the Prescott Town Missionary.

Richard Cope Morgan (1827-1908): journal editor and publisher. Morgan worked in his father's printing shop from 1841, and in a London printing house in London and Bath from 1842. He associated with the evangelical Samuel Chase in 1859 and together they launched the publishing company Morgan and Chase, becoming 'Morgan and Scott' when joined by Robert Scott in 1870. The company enabled them to publish numerous religious works, including evangelical biographies such as the phenomenally successful *Tell Jesus* by Anna Shipton (1863 – see below), A.E.'s *The Good Master* (1865 – see below) and John Macpherson's *The Christian Hero* (1867 – see below). Morgan also promoted the temperance movement and missionary projects.

The front page uses a Biblical quote to justify narrating an obscure life: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, / And exalted them of low degree' (Luke, i. 52). The work quotes extensively from the subject's preaching and focuses on stories of conversion. The biographer makes frequent parallels between his subject and biblical lives. The work is a largely unremarkable example of religious biography.

73.

Owen, Mrs. Octavius Freire, *The Heroines of Domestic Life* (London: Routledge, Warne, & Routledge, 1861).

403 pp. Reprinted in 1877.

Collective biography: Ruth, Antigone, Panthea, Eponina, Gertrude von der Wart, Margaret Roper, Anne Askew, Jeanne d'Albret, Pocahontas, Lucy Hutchinson, Lady Rachel Russell, Grizel Cochrane, Winifred (Countess of Nithsdale), Helen Walker, Flora Macdonald, Louise Schepler, Emilie de LaValette, Elizabeth Fry, Prasca Loupouloff, Sarah Martin, Grace Darling and Florence Nightingale.

Emily Owen (fl. 1859-63): writer. Owen's other works include a monthly religious magazine, *Home Thoughts*, and the novels *Raised to the Peerage* (1859) and *Snowed Up* (1863).

The sketches are short, dwell heavily on the main virtues of the subject, and are frequently interspersed with poetical quotations. The biographer insists that woman's role is to endure, to support others and that woman be allowed a more active role if it be directed towards helping others.

74.

Spedding, James, *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Longmans Green, Reader and Dyer, 1861-72), 7 vols.

Vol. 1: xvi + 421. Published in 1861. Covers the years 1560-95. Vol. 2: x + 392. Published in 1862. Covers the years 1595-1601. Vol. 3: xvi + 411pp. Portrait of the subject. Published in 1868. Covers the years 1601-7. Vol. 4: xii + 434pp. Published in 1868. Covers the years 1607-13. Vol. 5: xvi + 422pp. Published in 1869. Covers the years 1613-16. Vol. 6: xxx + 478pp. Published in 1872. Covers the years 1616-18. Vol. 7: xxxvi + 631. Published in 1872. Covers the years 1619-26.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626): philosopher and essayist. Bacon achieved lasting fame for his essays. *Essays* and *Colours of Good and Evil* were published in 1597. Other significant works include *The Proficiency and Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *De augmentis scientiarum* (1623).

James Spedding (1807-81): literary editor and biographer. Spedding studied at Cambridge, where he was one of the Apostles and a close friend of Richard Monckton Milnes, Thackeray, Arthur Hallam and Lord Alfred Tennyson (whose poems he reviewed in 1842 in the *Edinburgh Review*). He worked in the Colonial Office from 1835 and was secretary to the commission on the boundary between the United States and Canada from 1841. He began to research the lives and works of Francis Bacon, and published a first work on him, concerning Macaulay's depiction of Bacon, in 1848. He received the contract to edit Bacon's works in 1846 and took up much of the rest of his life. He refused the professorship of modern history at Cambridge in 1869 once the post fell vacant after Charles Kingsley's resignation.

The work is important for its attempt to set new scholarly standards for biography. The biography is another Victorian biographical monument. Spedding made extensive use of research and primary sources for the work. The portrait of Bacon is undoubtedly celebratory, but also calmly analytical. Carlyle, whose *Frederick the Great* (1858-65) was a similarly monumental achievement, admired Spedding's industry.

75.

Blackman, John, *A Memoir of the life and writings of Thomas Day, author of 'Sanford and Merton'* (London: John Bedford Leno, 1862).

128pp.

Thomas Day (1748-89): children's writer. Day was greatly influenced by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose theories he tried to apply to his own choice of wife and ideas on education. His eccentric behaviour included dropping wax on the arms of his prospective bride to test her fortitude. The children's book *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-9) provided a further vehicle for his thoughts on natural upbringing and proved hugely popular. His other significant work was *The History of Little Jack* (1788).

John Blackman (fl.1856-66): poet. Blackman also published the volume of poems *The Maud of the Vale, and Other Poems* (1844), *Flowers and Fancies* (1856) and *Home Scenes and Heart Memories* (1866).

The biography is relatively sketch-like and does not provide in-depth insights into the subject's mind, and there is very little critical appreciation of Day's works. The narrative is interspersed with moralising comments by Blackman. The biographer develops a tension between Day's work, which achieved fame, and Day himself, who lived in obscurity. Blackman uses this tension to reflect at length on the nature of humility and obscurity, and the advantages of retreating from the public eye. Unusually for a biography of such a significant author published in the 1860s, the work was published by subscription.

76.

Kavanagh, Julia, *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1862).

330 pp.

Collective biography: Aphra Behn, Miss Fielding, Madame D'Arblay, Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Radcliffe, Mrs Inchbald, Miss Edgeworth, Miss Austen, Mrs. Opie and Lady Morgan.

Julia Kavanagh (1824-77): novelist and biographer. Kavanagh, who was born in Ireland, spent some significant amount of her childhood in France, an experience that is reflected in many of her works, and the novel *Nathalie* (1850) in particular. Kavanagh achieved significant success with her collective biographies of women, such as *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* (1850), *French Women of Letters* (1862). She also published *Women of Christianity* in 1852 (see above).

Kavanagh's collective biographies sought to seek out and represent female lives and influences that reached beyond domestic spheres. Her works, including this, were part of an important, growing canonising process that set out to celebrate female lives.

77.

Smiles, Samuel, *Lives of the Engineers: with an account of their principal works; comprising also a history of inland communication in Britain* (London: John Murray, 1861-2), 3 vols.

Vol. 1: xvii + 483pp. Published in 1861. Vol. 2: xiv + 502pp. Published in 1861. Vol. 3: xxi + 512pp. Published in 1862. Reprinted in 1874, 1877, 1878, 1891, 1897, 1899, 1904, 1966, 1968 and 2001.

Collective biography: Sir Hugh Myddelton, James Brindley, John Smeaton, John Rennie, Thomas Telford, George Stephenson and Robert Stephenson.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper *Leeds Times*, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson. Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2) and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859 – see above), a work that was founded on the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see below) and Robert Dick (1878 – see below).

The biography combines Smiles's long-standing interest in railways and engineering together with the benefits of perseverance and self-help. As with his other works, the biography helped to develop interest in such subjects as new kinds of biographical heroes. The volumes are founded on extensive research and interviews, and provide an engaging picture of industrial Britain.

78.

Stevens, William, *A Memoir of Thomas Martin Wheeler, Founder of the Friend-in-Need Life and Sick Assurance Society, Domestic, Political, and Industrial, with extracts from his letters, speeches, and writings* (London: John Bedford Leno, 1862).

98 pp.

Thomas Martin Wheeler (1811-41): Chartist. Wheeler's father was a wheelwright and licensed victualler. He was sent to Lancashire for his education and the scenery of Ribble developed his poetic feeling. Wheeler became active in the Chartist cause, and developed an acquaintance with Robert Owen. Wheeler worked as a correspondent for the *Northern Star*. This political interest developed in tandem with an interest in amateur science. He delivered lectures on geology, and avoided discussing religion, which was still relatively unusual. His lectures were successful and he achieved a degree of popularity. Wheeler died in a train accident.

William Stevens (n.d.). Stevens was a friend of the subject, and seems to have published no other works.

The work resembles a pamphlet and is overall rather simplistic. Nevertheless, it is unusual for the biographer's lack of nervousness when dealing with the subject of Chartism. Despite this, the biographer's vision of working class life owes much to contemporary self-help literature: the working life is one of 'struggles', and the biography of a working man must be 'instructive'. Stevens deals with the subject's politics far more than with his writings, though he gives extracts from Wheeler's fiction and poetry. The facts of the subject's life are treated summarily (Wheeler's wife, for example, appears in the work with no introduction or presentation).

79.

Gilchrist, Alexander, *The Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus" with Selections from His Poems and Other Writings* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1863), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: xviii + 431pp. Vol. 2: viii + 264pp. A revised edition was published in 1880. Reprinted in 1906, 1907, 1928, 1942, 1845, 1973 and 1998.

William Blake (1757-1827): poet and painter. Blake produced a number of somewhat impenetrable poems, including *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-3) and *Jerusalem* and the rather more approachable *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794). He devoted his energies equally to poems and paintings and illustrated his own works. Blake's was largely unknown during his lifetime and lived in poverty.

Alexander Gilchrist (1828-61): biographer. Gilchrist was called to the bar in 1846 but embarked on a literary career instead, together with his wife Anne Gilchrist, writer and author of a biography of Mary Lamb (1883 - see below). Gilchrist published numerous articles in the *Eclectic Review*, including a piece on Etty, which led to a commission from David Bogue to write a full-length biography, published in 1855. The work was enjoyed by Thomas Carlyle, and led to a close friendships between the Gilchrists and Carlyles. Gilchrist's second major work was the first full-length biography of William Blake, though he died of scarlet fever before its completion. The work was finished by Anne Gilchrist, with the help of the Rossetti brothers.

The biography is a striking attempt to revive Blake's reputation. Gilchrist draws on Carlylean ideas of the sincere man to evoke his subject, and moulds Blake into a subject that would have been appealing to a Victorian audience – industrious and humble. A significant part of the work is the relationship Gilchrist imagines between the subject and himself, and the efforts he makes to help the reader engage emotionally and imaginatively with Blake. The emphasis on the discovery of manuscripts and locations make it one of the first 'quest

biographies'. Volume 1 consists of the biography, whilst volume 2 collects selections from Blake's works, with numerous engravings. Gilchrist was sufficiently successful in his efforts to champion Blake that the subtitle 'Pictor Ignotus' was dropped from the second edition in 1880.

80.

Cyrus, A. S. Mt, *George Beattie, of Montrose. A Poet, A Humourist, And a Man of Genius* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1863).

viii + 300pp.

George Beattie (1786-1823): poet. Beattie was the son of a Scottish crofter and salmon fisher. Beattie initially worked as a clerk but worked in the office of the procurator-fiscal after the death of his employer. He completed his legal studies and became a notary in 1807. He began to publish poems, including 'John o' Arnha', a mock-heroic poem published in 1815, and several others that appeared in the Montrose Review. Beattie committed suicide following his fiancée's decision to abandon him for another man after she inherited a small fortune.

Alexander Smith [pseudo. Cyrus, A. S. Mt.] (1830-67): essayist and poet. Smith was born in Scotland. He joined his father's trade of designing printing blocks for calico and muslin from the age of eleven, and had only an elementary education. He educated himself in literature and began to write poetry. His self-help activities led him to become secretary of the Glasgow Addisonian Literary Society, a self-improvement society where he delivered lectures. Smith met, and was encouraged by, the Reverend George Gilfillan, who patronised a number of young poets, and who prompted him to write 'A Life Drama', presented in The Critic by Gilfillan in 1851 and published in 1853. It sold extremely well: he was fêted as a revelation and he began to move in the circle led by Sydney Dobell. In 1854 Dobell and Smith produced the patriotic Sonnets on the War (1855), which was mocked by W. E. Aytoun in Blackwood's. He continued to publish and made important literary connections, before dying of typhus at the age of thirty-seven. His biography was published by the Reverend Thomas Brisbane in 1869 (see below).

The work displays a real effort to test the creative possibilities of the biographical genre, and the biographer imagines the subject's life as a drama with 'a plot, an action, and a progress'. The biographical dimension is intermingled with broader reflections on the age. The work is a somewhat nostalgic one that recalls tight-knit local communities destroyed by modern times and an 'unsocial age'. 'Mt. Cyrus', or Smith, is similarly interested in the historical periods more conducive to the development of eccentric characters, and develops the argument, in contrast to John Stuart Mill, that 'characters' are the product of weak societies. There is a strong emphasis on the local rather than the national, and small communities. Beattie's works are barely discussed. The biography is 127pp long, followed by the subject's literary remains.

81.

Shipton, Anna, *'Tell Jesus': Recollections of Emily Gosse* (London: Morgan and Chase, 1863).

88pp. Reprinted in 1911. The 1931 edition is advertised as the sixtieth impression.

Emily Gosse [*née* Bowes] (1806-57): religious tract writer. Emily was raised in Devon and London. She worked as a governess in clergymen's families. She joined the Brethren assembly at Hackney, where she met Philip Henry Gosse (1810-88) who she married in 1848. Gosse published religious poems, including *Abraham and his Children* (1855), and numerous

tracts. She died of breast cancer. Gosse is also commemorated within her son's memoir *Father and Son* (1907).

Anna Shipton (fl.1862-): religious writer. Shipton published a wide variety of religious works, encompassing poetry, such as *The Brook in the Way: Original Hymns and Poems* (1864), translations from French, biographies such as *Footsteps of the Flock: narratives illustrative of Christian Life* (1873).

The biography is divided into chapters named with biblical overtones, which illustrates the tendency of the work as a whole to favour abstractions over facts. The work is one of the more singular works of religious biography, in which the biographical narrative is interspersed with the biographer's insistence on her own sinfulness. The biblical commentary becomes increasingly rapturous and rhapsodic. The reader gains very little sense of Gosse's life, and the work moves in a circular rather than linear manner. Despite this, the biography was incredibly popular and continues to be reprinted by religious publishers.

82.

Thornton, Rev. Thomas, *Religion in Humble Life: A Sermon On the Death of Betty Adamson, a Weaver in the Cotton Mills at Golborne, Lancashire* (London: Rivingtons, 1863).

11 pp.

Betty Adamson (d. 1863): religious woman. Little is known of Adamson, who lived a pious life and worked as a weaver in Lancashire.

Reverend Thomas Thornton (fl. 1863): clergyman. Thornton was curate of Golborne. He also published *The Life of Moses, in a course of village lectures* the same year.

The work is an example of contemporary religious biography based on a sermon. The biographer announces that he had at first no intention of publishing the sermon, and the preface is a long-winded defence of his decision to appear in print. The sermon, simple and traditional, is of interest principally as an example of biography being used as an acceptable means for religious writers to publish their works.

83.

Barfoot, Reverend John, *Piety behind the plough, or observations founded on the life and character of Mr. George Warren, of Weston Underwood, Derbyshire* (London: Richard Davies, 1864).

ii + 48 pp.

George Warren (n.d.): Primitive Methodist ploughman in Derbyshire.

John Barfoot (fl. 1864-74): clergyman. The Barfoots were a Methodist family in Northern England. Barfoot was a Primitive Methodist clergyman, was also interested in the relations between the government and Primitive Methodist schools and published *Day Schools under Government Supervision described; with reasons why Primitive Methodists should accept educational grants* (1867). He also published a life of William Hickingbotham (1874 - see below).

The work is a religious biography that picks up the phrase 'the short and simple annals of the poor' in its preface, and which directly pits the work against contemporary biographies displaying greatness. Many parallels are made between the act of writing the life of an obscure man and the lessons of Christianity. It is a simple work, and is interesting principally as an example of the religious use of 'obscure lives', and the extended use of biography by Methodists.

84.

Russell, W., *Eccentric Personages* (London: John Maxwell and Company, 1864), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 308pp. Vol. 2: 308pp. Reprinted in 1865.

Collective biography: Le Docteur Devine, Sir Andrew Sellwood, Beau Brummell, Lady Hester Stanhope, Beau Nash, Sir Gerald Massey, Margaret Fuller, the Earl of Peterborough, Sir Samuel Smith, Amazon Snell, Daniel Defoe, John Loftus, Jonathan Swift, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Christina of Sweden, John Abernethy, Captain Morris, J. M. W. Turner, Lord Norbury, the Chevalier d'Eon, Joseph Balsamo, Thomas Marquis of Wharton and Malmesbury, Philip Duke of Wharton and Northumberland, Bamfylde Moore Carew, Monsieur Blaise, Madame La Comtesse de Genlis, Lady Morris and a descendant of Owen Glendower.

William Russell (fl. 1856-64): writer. Russell, who is largely unknown, also appears to have published *Recollections of a Detective Police Officer* under the pseudonym 'C. Waters' (1856) and other works of uncertain authorship.

The work is more concerned with providing lively anecdotes than with offering any sustained analysis of eccentricity. Russell employs a light, mocking tone devoid of sympathy or indulgence: the subjects are there to be mocked at. The biographer is particularly merciless with his eccentric women, who were often in fact less eccentric than simply strong-minded.

85.

Taylor, Thomas, *A Memoir of Thomas Ebenezer Taylor, (who died, aged 21 years). By His Father. With selections from his literary remains, edited, with preface, by the Rev. George Gilfillan* (London: H. J. Tresidder, 1864). Second edition.

iii + 162pp. Photograph of the subject.

Thomas Ebenezer Taylor (1842-63): poet. Taylor was raised in the County of Lancaster and showed an early interest in books. He began writing, and was encouraged by John Stanyan Bigg, author of *Night and the Soul* (1854). He worked in the Ulverston and Lancaster Railway Offices from age 15 and was transferred to Barrow in 1862.

Thomas Taylor (fl. 1864): Baptist clergyman. Taylor was a pastor in Lancaster and at Tottlebank. This appears to have been his only publication. Thomas Taylor was the subject's father.

The biography draws parallels between his subject and John Keats: both died young and left unfinished and fragmentary works. The biographer is drawn to the picturesque and dwells at length on the scenery that surrounded the subject. There is a particularly strong emphasis on Taylor's childhood. The Romantic depiction of poetry is combined with a lengthy description of the subject's quality that draws heavily on self-help literature, as the biographer explains how his subject embodied the virtues of self-reliance, industry, perseverance, etc. Though the subject's early ambition was for worldly fame he underwent a conversion and became increasingly concerned with living a Christ-like existence. The biography itself is 110pp and followed by the subject's poems. The work was published by subscription, and many of the subscribers appear within the biography as acquaintances of the subject.

86.

[Anonymous], *Heroines of the Household, by the author of 'The Heavenward Path', and 'Popular Preachers of the Ancient Church'. With illustrations by M. Ellen Edwards* (London: James Hogg and Sons, 1864).

299p. Reprinted in 1869.

Collective biography: Monica, the mother of Augustine, Olympia Morata, Lady Brilliana Harley, Grisell Hume, Madame de Chantal, Mademoiselle Legras, Madame de Miramion, Caroline Claudius, Mary Anne Galton, the Kaiserwerth Deaconess, Miss Marsh.

Reverend William Wilson (fl. 1859-76): clergyman. Wilson was a minister of the Free Church at Musselburgh. His other publication includes the collective biography, *The Popular Preachers of the Ancient Church; their lives, their manners, and their work* (1859).

The work aims to depict and delimit woman's sphere and influence. The biographer points out that all these diverse lives are linked by a common religious impulse. For Wilson, Christian female biography is a distinctive genre that illustrates the moral life of different historical periods. To study these lives is to study the extent of Christianity in the country at any given time. The sketches are simplistic, and make some use of direct speech.

87.

A, E., *'The Good Master', or, light in a dark place, being some particulars of the faithful life of Joseph Round, a Staffordshire collier* (London: Morgan & Chase, 1865).

50pp. Reprinted in 1869. Also published, simultaneously, in Derby: Rowbottom, and in Ashbourn: Hobson and Son.

Joseph Round (1804-55): collier. Round was born in Dudley, Worcestershire. He left school aged twelve to work in the coal pit. He was given to cursing and swearing, until he was converted by a sermon when he was sixteen. He married a pious woman in 1823. A year later, he became unemployed but placed his faith in the Lord. He circulated tracts amongst his fellow workers, and he started a prayer meeting.

Elizabeth Andrews (fl. 1865): tract distributor. Little is known of Andrews, who lived in South Staffordshire. She first met the subject thirty years before the publication of the work, when he had approached her for a religious tract. This appears to be her only published work.

The work is a religious biography aimed at the working classes. As with many similar works, the appeal to working-class interest is then substituted with a strongly religious narrative. The title uses a well-worn biblical phrase; the biography provides almost no facts on the subject's life but uses him as an exemplum. Much of the work is drawn from the subject's letters. The work is small in size and resembles a tract.

88.

Fitzgerald, John F. G. Purcell, *A quiet worker for good: a familiar sketch of the late John Charlesworth, B.D..., Rector of St. Mildred's, Bread Street, London* (London: Dalton & Lucy, 1865).

154 pp.

John Charlesworth (1782-1864): clergyman. Charlesworth was born in Nottingham. His father was Rector of the Parish of Ossington. Charlesworth initially studied medicine and was apprenticed to a surgeon. His brother became a successful physician in London. Charlesworth made the acquaintance of Henry Thornton and became involved with the Clapham Sect. He turned towards religion and was ordained deacon in 1809. Charlesworth pursued his studies at Cambridge in the early 1820s. Thornton presented him with the Rectory of Flowton in 1814, and he worked there for thirty years, before moving to London in 1844.

John F. G. Purcell Fitzgerald (fl. 1865-77): biographer. Fitzgerald's non-biographical work includes a publication on the 'Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act' (1877). Fitzgerald also wrote several short biographies of religious subjects, such as the Reverend J. Gay (1870).

The narrative itself is of little interest, and the work is principally useful as an example of the type of Victorian pious and morbid biography commemoration that would be the target of

later attacks. The biographer disposes of the facts of the life within the first three pages, before spending the rest of the sketch reflecting on Christianity and the subject's beneficial influence. The work has some interest as a sketch of the Clapham Sect, and the small interest of the work derives from the mention of more famous contemporary religious figures met by the subject. The text of the biography is framed by a black, funereal-looking black border.

89.

Martin, Frederick, *The Life of John Clare* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1865).

301pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1964.

John Clare (1793-1864): poet. Clare was the son of a humble Northamptonshire labourer. He worked as a labourer himself whilst writing poetry. His first volume, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, appeared in 1820, successfully patronised by the publisher John Taylor. Clare also published *The Village Minstrel* (1821), *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827) and *The Rural Muse* (1835). After a brief period of lionization, however, he lapsed into obscurity, and was admitted to an asylum in 1837 following periods of delusion. Though largely ignored, Clare continued to write poetry in the asylum.

Frederick Joseph Martin (1830-83): writer. Martin was born in Switzerland and educated in Germany. When he moved to England he began work as a teacher and as Thomas Carlyle's amanuensis from 1856. Carlyle was dissatisfied with his work and irritated by the man, whom he described as a 'weak helpless creature', and dismissed him. It later emerged that Martin had stolen some of Carlyle's documents. Martin began a biography of Carlyle in *The Statesman*, a magazine that he launched, but both were discontinued. Disraeli gave him a yearly pension for his *Statesman's Year-Book*, begun in 1864 and which he continued until 1882, when J. Scott Keltie replaced him. Martin also published *The National History of England* (1873) and works on finance and commerce.

The biography is the first full-length biography of John Clare. The work is extremely lively and draws heavily on English literary history: parallels are made with, and scenes are modelled on, passages from folktales, pastoral narratives, Shakespeare, and Tennyson, amongst others. The work is romanced and unreliable. Martin varies wildly in his conception of the poet, and moves repeatedly from compassion to mockery. Clare is depicted as a misfit, a representation which is brought out by the biographer's extensive use of clothes imagery. Unusually, Martin makes no apologies for Clare's more questionable behaviour. The work is above all a heated condemnation of patrons who lionise vulnerable poets only to then abandon them, and the biographer calls upon the nation to account for this.

90.

Stuart, Rev. A. Moody, *Life and Letters of Elisabeth, Last Duchess of Gordon* (London: James Nesbit and Co., 1865).

vii + 396pp. Portrait of the subject.

Elisabeth Gordon, duchess of Gordon [*née* Brodie] (1794-1864): evangelical patron. Gordon was the daughter of a wealthy merchant. She was raised largely by her aunts. The heiress married George Gordon, marquess of Huntly (1770-1836) and they were married in 1813. Gordon disliked the decadence of the sphere in which she lived and converted to evangelicalism in the mid 1820s, and she began to patronise local clergymen, supported missionary activities and ended the parties and balls that had occurred in her home before. She joined the Free Church of Scotland in 1846.

Reverend Alexander Moody Stuart (1809-88): clergyman. Stuart began a new congregation at St. Luke's in Edinburgh and was close to the evangelical pastor Robert

Murray M'Cheyne (1813-43). Stuart also published a life of the missionary John Duncan. Kenneth Moody Stuart published his biography in 1900.

The biography is completely written, though unremarkable, and finds a good balance between quotations from the subject's letters and the biographer's own narrative. Stuart adopts a relatively harsh and judgmental tone towards his subject.

91.

[Anonymous], *'More Precious than Rubies': Biographies of Good Women, Chiefly by Contributors to 'The Monthly Packet'* (London: J. and C. Mozley, 1862). First series.

472pp.

Collective biography: Olympia Morata, Lady Fanshawe, Mrs. Hutchinson, Lady Russell, Lady Grisell Baillie, Countess of Balcarres, Mum Bett, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Smith, Mrs Grant of Laggan, Caroline Perthes, Princess Galitzin, Madame Swetchine, Mrs. Fry, Miss Anna Gurney, Amalie Sieveking.

Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823-1901): novelist. Yonge was born into a clerical family. She received a sound though isolating education from her father, and she taught in his Sunday school from the young age of seven. Yonge's confirmation was prepared by John Keble, and she was greatly influenced by his ideas. Her first novel was *Abbeychurch, or, Self Control and Self Conceit* (1844) and proceeds were donated to charity, and numerous novels followed, including her most famous work, *The Heir of Redcleffe* (1853). Her works, which stressed Tractarian ideas and the importance of piety, were aimed at a wide readership, from the less educated classes to the middle classes. Her other biographical work included a biography of her cousin, the missionary John Coleridge Patteson, published in 1874. She published in total over two hundred works and was important in disseminating Tractarian ideas.

The work was edited by Charlotte Yonge. The collective biography was prompted by painted portraits seen by Yonge at the Manchester Exhibition, which stimulated thoughts on the impressions of truth given by portraits. Yonge goes on to compare fiction with the 'wild inconsistencies of actual life', and rehearses the common idea that reality is stranger than fiction. The subjects are divided into 'sufferers', 'learners' and 'workers'. The work is aimed at young girls, and drawn from sketches taken from a variety of works.

92.

Brightwell, Miss, *"Above Rubies", or, Memorials of Christian Gentlewomen*. (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1866).

304 pp.

Collective biography: Anne (Countess of Balcarres), Madame Guizot, Caroline Perthes, Mrs Grant of Laggan, Madame Necker, Lady Fanshawe, Winifred Herbert (Countess of Nithisdale) Louisa (Queen of Prussia), Mrs Susannah Wesley, Kartherine von Bora, Luther's wife and Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson.

Cecilia Lucy Brightwell (1811-75): writer and etcher. Brightwell was born into a nonconformist family near Norwich, and was the daughter of a solicitor and amateur microscopist. She wrote over twenty works, principally biographical, and most of which are preoccupied with religious and moral guidance. Her most important work is *Memorials of Amelie Opie* (1854). She also attracted notoriety for her skilful etchings, including a striking copy of Rembrandt's *Landscape with a Cottage and Hay Barn, 1641*.

The work is a somewhat typical example of Victorian collective biography aimed at illustrating female worth. It stresses what woman is capable of when animated by Christian fervour. The title, together with the choice of subjects, suggests that it was strongly influenced by the collective biographies edited by Charlotte Yonge in 1862 and 1865.

93.

Martin, Frederick, *Poems by Thomas Chatterton, With a Memoir* (London: Charles Griffin and Company, 1866).

xxxxvi + 168pp.

Thomas Chatterton (1752-70): poet. Chatterton grew to notoriety by forging poems said to have been written by a Bristol monk, Thomas Rowley. He travelled to London to develop his literary career but committed suicide four months later. Chatterton was later championed by the Romantic poets as the symbol of the tormented poet and the neglected genius.

Frederick Joseph Martin (1830-83): writer. Martin was born in Switzerland and educated in Germany. When he moved to England he began work as a teacher and as Thomas Carlyle's amanuensis from 1856. Carlyle was dissatisfied with his work and irritated by the man, whom he described as a 'weak helpless creature' and dismissed him. It later emerged that Martin had stolen some of Carlyle's documents. Martin began a biography of Carlyle in *The Statesman*, a magazine that he launched, but both were discontinued. Disraeli gave him a yearly pension for his *Statesman's Year-Book*, begun in 1864 and which he continued until 1882, when J. Scott Keltie replaced him. Martin also published *The National History of England* (1873) and works on finance and commerce.

This unpretending sketch is principally of interest from the manner in which it shows Frederick Martin pursuing his interest in neglected literary geniuses, after the success of his 1865 biography of John Clare (see above). The sketch contains Martin's characteristic romancing and vivid style, but it is otherwise unremarkable.

94.

Timbs, John *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities* (London: Bentley, 1866), 2 vols.

xiii + 567pp. Reprinted in 1875 and 1877.

Collective biography: well over fifty lives are included. They include the relatively famous, such as William Beckford, and the more obscure, such as 'the Spendthrift Squire of Halston, John Mytton'.

John Timbs (1801-75): writer. Timbs was apprenticed to a printer and druggist, and simultaneously wrote and published articles in the *Monthly Magazine*. He became an amanuensis to the magazine's publisher, Sir Richard Phillips, in London, and the range of periodicals he wrote for widened. He worked as the sub-editor of the *Illustrated London News* between 1842 and 1858. Timbs wrote on numerous works on a wide range of subjects, from zoology, domestic life, inventions such as the electric telegraph cable, art and drama. He was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1854. His other biographical works include *Schooldays of Eminent Men* (1858) and *Anecdote Lives of Wits and Humourists* (1862).

Timbs divides his chosen eccentrics into categories: 'wealth and fashion', 'delusions, impostures and fanatic missions', 'strange sights and sporting scenes', 'eccentric artists', 'theatrical folks', 'men of letters', 'convivial eccentricities' and 'miscellanea'. The collective biography is less merciless in its tone than that of William Russell, *Eccentric Personages* (1864 – see above). For Timbs, eccentricity can be found in noble characters. These eccentrics are not men and women of dangerous excess, but individuals who demonstrate that 'with oddity of character may co-exist much goodness of heart'. Timbs is aware of the contemporary interest in eccentrics, and claims originality for his own work by focusing on contemporary subjects. The sketches are good-humoured and, predictably, rely heavily on anecdotes.

95.

Tyack, William Davis, *The Miner of Perranzabuloe: Or, Simple Records of a Good Man's Life* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co, 1866).

xv + 156pp. Reprinted in 1869.

William Murrish (1818-61): miner. Murrish was born in Cornwall, one of five children. He was interested in religion from an early age. The death of his brother aged twelve made a vivid impression on his mind, and it coincided with a religious revival in his neighbourhood. He momentarily lost this interest when his father lapsed into alcoholism. His father converted before his death, however, and as Murrish took over the family he too embraced religion. In 1840 he began a correspondence with his cousin, William Kernick, for the sake of mutual improvement, and the pair addressing various subjects such as music, teetotalism and religion. Murrish filled the offices of class-leader and sunday-school superintendent in his area.

William Tyack Davis (fl. 1866-77): writer. The biographer was acquainted with the subject from 1850. He also published a volume of poetry, *The Snow and other poems*, in 1877.

The work is representative of contemporary Methodist biography. It is dedicated to 'that devoted host of Christian Workers'. The preface states that most social classes have their 'representative men' commemorated in biographies but that working men are left without heroes. The biography is intended as a corrective to this trend. The work opens with a picturesque description, in which the biographer describes his encounter with the subject. Much of the work consists of the correspondence between biographer and subject. Thomas Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' is used as a reference. The Christian working-class man is distanced from other working-class men by the biographer who describes them as rough and uncouth. An insightful description of working-class life is ignored in favour of a more abstract religious narrative. One interesting feature of the work is a reflection on working-class men's relationship with genealogy and the difficulty of their recovering their past.

96.

Adams, W[illiam] H[enry] Davenport, *The Sunshine of Domestic Life, or Sketches of womanly virtues, and stories of the lives of noble women* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1867).

303 pages. Reprinted in 1904 and 1911.

Collective biography: Lady Vere, Lady Alicia Lisle, Elizabeth Gaunt, Elizabeth Inchbald, Lady Arabella Stuart, Flora Macdonald, Lady Jane Grey, Mary Countess of Pembroke, Queen Jeanne D'Albret and Madame Roland.

William Henry Davenport Adams (1828-1891): journalist and writer. Adams began his literary career as a journalist as the editor of a newspaper in the Isle of Wight, and began to contribute to leading London periodicals and newspapers such as the *London Journal*. His works included popular science writing, military history, didactic works for children, translation, lexicography and a concordance to Shakespeare's plays. He published over 140 works in total. His other biographies include *English Party Leaders* (1878) and *Good Queen Anne* (1886).

Davenport associates each subject with a virtue that is deemed to contribute to domestic harmony and happiness, and each sketch is introduced by a short paragraph bringing out the moral of the tale. There is a patriotic overtone in the biographer's stress on the women's contribution to the health of the nation. The work is aimed at young readers.

97.

Macpherson, Rev. John, *The Christian hero: a sketch of the life of Robert Annan* (London: Morgan & Chase, 1867).

vi + 106pp. Reprinted in 1873 and 1878.

Robert Annan (1834-67): religious man. Annan was born at Hilltown, Dundee. He was a mischevious boy, and was apprenticed to a merchant as a clerk from the age of fourteen. He disliked the work and left to work with his father as a mason. Annan lived a largely irreligious life, spent three months in prison, and was paid by his father to leave for America, where he continued to live recklessly. Annan travelled to Canada, and joined the army there, which then brought him back to a camp in England, at Aldershot. There, he made friends with a group of Christians and began his conversion. They employed him as a teacher and he attended revival meetings. Annan returned to work as a mason but also developed a career as a travelling preacher.

John Macpherson (1847-1902): religious writer. Macpherson was a clergyman at the Hilltown Free Church in Dundee. He is also the author of the *Life and Labours of Duncan Matheson, the Scottish Evangelist* (1871) and *Henry Moorhouse, the English Evangelist* (1881) together with religious histories and theological discussions. Macpherson published a biography of his sister, Isabella Macpherson, in 1890 (see below).

The work is a simplistic work that uses the life as a parable on sin and the Lord's saving of sinners. The narrative is heavily clogged with Biblical quotations and interpretations. It is an example of a poorly written biography that nevertheless achieved some popularity, with reprints in 1873 and 1878. Chapters are given parabolic titles, 'wandering', 'returning', 'working in the vineyard', 'sowing beside all waters', 'wayfaring and warfaring', etc. What sounds like an unusually eventful life is made dull through a lack of detail.

98.

Stuart, Rev. A. Moody, *Missionary Life Among the Jews in Moldavia, Galicia & Silesia. Memoir and letters of Mrs. Edward. With preface by A. M. Stuart* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1867).

319pp. Portrait of the subject.

Catherine Edward [*née* Grant] (1813-1861): missionary. Edward was the daughter of a Banffshire minister. After having worked as a governess, she married the Free Church missionary Daniel Edward (1815-96) in 1846 and emigrated with him to Moldavia, (where they met with little success as missionaries amongst the Jewish community) and then to Galicia. Having given birth to five children, Catherine's health decreased until she died in Breslau.

Reverend Alexander Moody Stuart (1809-88): clergyman. Stuart began a new congregation at St. Luke's in Edinburgh and was close to the evangelical pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-43). Stuart also published a life of the missionary John Duncan. Kenneth Moody Stuart published his biography in 1900.

The biography is presented as being 'edited' by Stuart, and it follows the formula of letters connected by short linking narratives. This work is more cluttered with biblical quotations than most of the works in this group, the language is more ponderous, and the preoccupation is more with religious matters than on the trials of travelling and the missionary life. As such, it is a rather uncharacteristic female missionary biography.

99.

Woodcock, Rev. Henry, *The hero of the Humber, or the history of the late Mr John Ellerthorpe, foreman of the Humber Dock Gates, Hull* (London: Elliot Stock, 1868; London: S.W. Partridge, 1868). Second edition.

125pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1880.

John Ellerthorpe (1806-68): foreman. Ellerthorpe was interested from his early youth in the sea. A youthful inclination for drink was tempered by an evangelical sermon. His definitive conversion occurred in 1846, and he made pious resolutions and began to keep a diary. He began philanthropic work and signed a temperance pledge. Ellerthorpe learnt to swim and began to impress local men with his feats of endurance. He gained local notoriety for having saved above thirty-nine men from drowning.

Reverend Henry Woodcock (b. 1813): clergyman. Woodcock also published *Popery Unmasked, Wonders of Grace and Piety Among the Peasantry* (1889).

The biography is initially presented as a sensational work resembling short eighteenth-century biographies of eccentrics, and advertises 'remarkable incidents in his career as a sailor' and his daring rescue of over forty people. Sensationalism is married with Christian piety. The work is dedicated to the 'Seamen of Great Britain', with the wish that they embrace religion. However, though the religious content is far less dominant than in many works of this type. The preface, interestingly, reflects on the conception of the hero as put forward by Gladstone and Carlyle. The work is lively, with commentaries on the nature of sailors at this time. The use of the subject's diary is not too dominating. The biography includes short accounts of the circumstances surrounding the saving of the drowning men, and reprints some of the testimonials and honours the subject was given, including a medal from the Royal Humane Society.

100.

Brisbane, Reverend Thomas, *The Early Years of Alexander Smith, poet and essayist. A study for young men. Chiefly reminiscences of ten years of companionship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1869).

xi + 203pp.

Alexander Smith (1829-67): poet and essayist. Smith was born in Scotland. He joined his father's trade of designing printing blocks for calico and muslin from the age of eleven, and had only an elementary education. He educated himself in literature and began to write poetry. His self-help activities led him to become secretary of the Glasgow Addisonian Literary Society, a self-improvement society where he delivered lectures. Smith met, and was encouraged by, the Reverend George Gilfillan, who patronised a number of young poets including Thomas Ebenezer Taylor, and who prompted him to write 'A Life Drama', presented in *The Critic* by Gilfillan in 1851 and published in 1853. It sold extremely well: he was fêted as a revelation and began to move in the circle led by Sydney Dobell. In 1854 Dobell and Smith produced the patriotic *Sonnets on the War* (1855), which was mocked by W. E. Aytoun in *Blackwood's*. He continued to publish and made important literary connections, before dying of typhus at the age of thirty-seven.

Reverend Thomas Brisbane (n.d.): clergyman. Brisbane was a close acquaintance of the subject and does not appear to have published any other works.

Brisbane initially claims, somewhat mistakenly, the notoriety of his subject, though by the close of the biography he acknowledges Smith's relative mediocrity. The biographer separates the life and the work and, unusually, places far more emphasis on Smith's work, and develops the idea of a 'literary biography' in interesting ways. The work is competent and does not overuse quotations from Smith's works. There is an autobiographical dimension to

the work as the biographer depicts his friendship with the subject. The biographer insists that the subject's virtuous life was a more impressive legacy than his work – an assessment that was more commonly made in biographies of women writers.

101.

Dayman, Henry, *The beloved physician: a memoir of the late Dr. Joseph Bullar* (Southampton: W. Sharlan, 1869).

26pp.

Joseph Bullar (1808-69): physician. Bullar was born in Southampton and trained as a physician. He worked as a dresser from 1829 before working as a surgeon until 1860. He combined his work with an interest in literature, and published *Evening Thoughts. By a Physician* (1850) and *Thoughts of a Physician* (1868).

Henry Dayman (fl. 1869-77): surgeon. Dayman also wrote a short pamphlet-like memoir of Edward Harman Paul (1876), for the Southampton Medical Society, and an address on *Medicine and Morals* (1877).

The biographer introduces the sketch with a reflection on the biographies of famous men of whom little is known, and takes Shakespeare as his example. Dayman develops an interesting parallel between biography and medical terms through the imagery of metastasis. The biographer wavers between literary reflections, Christian reflections, and medical thoughts. The sketch is interspersed with quotations from poetry, including from Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Byron and Landor.

102.

Drane, Augusta Theodosia, *Life of Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869).

xx + 539 pp. Reprinted in 1929.

Mary Margaret Hallahan [*name in religion* Margaret of the Mother of God] (1802-1868): Roman Catholic nun. Hallahan was the daughter of working-class Irish parents living in London, and was orphaned from the age of eleven, after which she led a turbulent childhood. She left with a family for Bruges, where she worked as their servant, in 1829, and became involved in Roman Catholicism. Hallahan began a trial period as a lay sister before making her profession in 1835. She superintended a community of Dominican sisters in the 1840s in various English towns. She also engaged in extensive administrative and charitable work.

Augusta Theodosia Drane [*name in religion* Francis Raphael] (1823-94): prioress and author. Drane was the daughter of an East India tradesman, and Drane learnt much from his large travel library. She was a member of the established Church until encountering Tractarian belief. She converted to Roman Catholicism in 1850, and professed her vows at the congregation of Stone in Staffordshire three years later. A woman of extraordinary energy, she produced, amongst other works, works of fiction, biographies of St. Dominic (1857), a study of *Christian Schools and Scholars* (1867) and of the Dominican Order (1896). She combined literary activities with the management of 150 sisters in four different convents and engaged with contemporary artistic and intellectual debates.

The work is extremely readable, and is marked by a strong sense of humour and vivid style. The biography is significant as being one of the few biographies of a nun written from the perspective of a fellow-nun, and the intimacy with the subject and her way of life can be sensed. There is a picaresque element to the early portions of the work, when Hallahan was a child and showed unusual physical strength, even fighting off a sexual predator with a knife. Hallahan is subjected to a lengthy and detailed character analysis, in which Drane attempts to be fair rather than hagiographical, and there are some striking passages in which Hallahan's

inability to engage emotionally with others and her morbid fear of introspection are considered in detail. It is a complex portrait.

103.

Austen-Leigh, J. E., *A Memoir of Jane Austen by her nephew* (London: Richard Bentley, 1870).

236pp. Portrait of the subject. The biography was reprinted in 1871, 1883, 1906, 1926, 1965, 1979, and 2002.

Jane Austen (1775-1817): novelist. Austen published the celebrated novels *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811, *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, and also *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1716), *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (both posth., 1818).

James Edward Austen-Leigh (1798-1874): clergyman. Austen-Leigh was Jane Austen's nephew, the son of her eldest brother. He was educated at Oxford and worked as a country clergyman, and served as the vicar of Bray from 1852 until his death. He was well acquainted with the author in his youth. He also authored *Recollections of the Early Days of the Vine Hunt and of its Founder William John Chute. Together with brief notices of the adjoining hunts*, by 'a sexagenarian' (1865).

This was the first full-length biography of Jane Austen. It is well written and engaging, and makes a good and balanced use of manuscripts and letters. A striking aspect of the work is the biographer's explicit reflection on the problems of writing a biography of an uneventful life, which leads to a sustained interest in domestic history and the history of traditions, manners and mores. This broader definition of historiography is used to justify the sustained depiction of a woman's life. The work is however also pious, censored and the biographer was keen to make his aunt seem remote and more obscure than she was. The famous novelist appears more as an amateur than one of the greatest novelists of the age.

104.

By her sister, *Memorials of Agnes Elizabeth Jones* (London: Strahan & Co., 1871).

xxxix + 488 pp.

Agnes Elizabeth Jones (1832-68): nurse. Agnes Elizabeth and her sister were the daughters of the Irishman Colonel Jones. Agnes was interested in an early age in philanthropy and visiting the sick. Inspired by a visit to the hospital and community of deaconesses Kaiserswerth, in Germany, she return in 1860 to train there as a nurse. After various postings, she became a Nightingale probationer at St. Thomas's Hospital, London. She eventually superintended the Liverpool workhouse infirmary and is considered to have pioneered workhouse nursing, a work in which she excelled, though Nightingale was concerned by her religious fervour.

J. Jones (n.d.): Agnes Elizabeth Jones's sister. This appears to have been her only publication.

The biographer is clearly in admiration of her sister, though a sense of resentment at having been passed over in favour of a nursing career can be detected. The work downplays ideas of female ambition in favour of an emphasis on a determination to follow God's work and plans. The biography relies heavily on the subject's letters and diary entries, and third person narrative is kept to a minimum. The main interest of the work is the preface by Florence Nightingale, reprinted from *Good Words*, a high-pitched war-cry to women which contrasts with the work's quiet, unpretending tone.

105.

Bourne, Frederick William, *The King's son, or a memoir of Billy Bray : Compiled largely from his own memoranda* (London: Bible Christian Book Room, 1871).

iv + 125pp. Reprinted in 1877, 1899, 1890, 1902, 1937 and 1966.

William Trewartha Bray [*known as Billy Bray*] (1794-1868): Bible Christian preacher. Bray, born in Cornwall, developed from a life as a drunken miner to a passionate and famous preacher after coming across John Bunyan's 'Visions of Heaven and Hill' in 1824. He built numerous chapels, including one at Bethel, Cross Lanes. He was known for his charisma and energy.

Frederick William Bourne (1830-1905): preacher and writer. Bourne was a preacher in the Kent Bible Christian circuit, and became assistant editor of the Bible Christian Magazine. He became the principal leader of the Bible Christians in the 1870s. He also authored lives of William Bailey (1880) and James Thorne of Shebbear (1895), and an important history of *The Bible Christians Their Origin and History 1815-1900* (1905).

The biography is principally the celebration of a local celebrity from humble life. The work begins with a fairly traditional account of how the subject fell into bad company, began to drink before converting and living a Christian life. Large passages of quotations from Bray's own writings and preaching are interspersed with biographical commentaries and the biographer's own enthusiastic remarks on religious faith. Anecdotes are privileged over sustained analysis. Unlike many similar religious accounts of conversion the biography does not use an autobiographical framework in which the biographer encounters the subject. The biography was a phenomenal success.

106.

Smiles, Samuel, *Character* (London: John Murray, 1871).

viii + 388pp. Reprinted in 1874, 1878, 1879n 1882, 1885, 1888, 1890, 1902, 1910, and 1925.

Collective biography: includes sketches of well over a hundred subjects, both famous and obscure.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper *Leeds Times*, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson. Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2 – see above) and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859 – see above), a work that was founded on the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see below) and Robert Dick (1878 – see below).

The collective biography is a typical Smilesian production. The work is divided into sub-sections: 'influence of character', 'home power', 'companionship and example', 'work', 'courage', 'self-control', 'duty – truthfulness', 'temper', 'manner – art', 'companionship of books', 'companionship in marriage', and 'the discipline of experience'. The headings aptly

reflect the core principles of Smiles's thought. The work pursues Smiles's interest in the Carlylean belief in the value of biographies of great men. There is also an interesting reflection, however, on the notion that actions are of greater import than literature, including biography.

107.

Hare, Augustus J. C., *Memorials of a Quiet Life* (London: Strahan & Co., 1872), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: ix + 499pp. Portrait of subject. Vol. 2: 482pp. A supplementary volume, of 263pp, consisting largely of photographs, was published in 1876. The edition published in 1875 is advertised as the twelfth edition. The biography was reprinted by Smith, Elder & Co in 1884, which was also the eighteenth edition.

Maria Hare [*née* Lecyester] (1798-1870). Lecyester was the daughter of Oswald Leycester, the rector of Stoke upon Tern in Shropshire, and she was raised amongst country rectories. Her marriage to the biographer's uncle Augustus Hare took place in 1829, though the marriage was short-lived as he died in 1834. Maria Hare decided to take in the biographer and raised him. Her life was a calm one, and she gained pleasure from her home and family, and visits with the family of Reginald Heber who lived in the vicinity.

Augustus John Cuthbert Hare (1834-1903): writer. Hare was adopted by Maria Leycester, his godmother, in 1835. He travelled in his youth and published travel guidebooks for John Murray, *Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire* (1860) and *A Handbook to Durham* (1863). He remained abroad, due to Maria's ill health, until 1870, after which he published her biography to great success. He continued to pen guidebooks and biographies. He is principally remembered for his autobiography, *The Story of my Life* (1896-1900), 6 vols.

Hare's memorial biography of his adoptive mother was enormously successful, and went into eighteen editions. It is more of a collective, domestic biography of a family than a woman, though Hare is interested in demonstrating how she was the foundation of the family. The subject had initially sought to publish a memoir of her husband, then of Augustus and Julius Hare, but died before completing them. The biography posits itself in part as an act of filial duty. The biography is undoubtedly too long for the simple events it recounts. It is readable, however, and engagingly simple, and offers a vivid portrait of contemporary domestic life. The Christian content is not overbearing as in many domestic biographies of the time, and the use of letters and diary entries is similarly balanced. Each chapter is introduced with a quotation, from poets such as Wordsworth. The third volume, published later, is a collection of paintings and photographs.

108.

Forster, John, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872-4), 3 vols.

Vol. 1: 398pp. Portrait of subject. Published in 1872. Vol. 2: 462pp. Portrait of subject. Published in 1873. Vol. 3: 552pp. Portrait of subject. Published in 1874. Reprinted in 1876 (thirteenth edition), 1878, 1879, 1892, 1899, 1903, 1907, 1910, 1911, 1927, 1928, 1966 and 1969.

Charles Dickens (1812-70): novelist. Dickens was the author of such immense successes as *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Hard Times* (1854).

John Forster (1812-76): biographer and writer. Forster was the son of a Unitarian butcher and cattle dealer. He showed an early interest in the theatre and wrote a melodrama, which was performed when he was sixteen. He later studied law and was called to the bar in 1843, before becoming secretary to the lunacy commission in 1855. He began to contribute to London periodicals, published a volume of verse (1832) and worked as a drama critic. He received a commission to write biographies of seventeenth-century figures, and published the

resulting *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen* from 1836 to 1839. Forster came into contact with Charles Dickens and the two became close friends. Forster became a friend and adviser to numerous prominent men and women of letters, including Tennyson, Elizabeth Gaskell, Bulwer-Lytton, Leigh Hunt, Walter Savage Landor and Robert Browning. His other important biography was *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, published in 1848, though he also wrote lives of Sir John Eliot (1864), Walter Savage Landor (1869) and Jonathan Swift (1875).

The work is an engaging and lively biography. The work does not progress in a strict chronological manner, as the biographer frequently provides an overview of a period in Dickens's life before going back to individual incidents. The biography repeatedly pauses to consider novels and certain characters in depth before picking up the narrative again. Forster interestingly uses a number of different perspectives to evoke the subject: the biographer who knows how the life will end, the biographer who pretends to be with the reader in a state of ignorance at future events, the perspective of the young Dickens unaware of his future, the perspective of the older Dickens looking back on his life, and the perspective of Forster looking back on his youth before he knew of Dickens's fame. The work moves between past and present, and changes in what it expects the reader to already know about the subject. Forster was heavily criticised for making too much of his own role in Dickens's life, with some justification. There is no mention of Ellen Ternan.

109.

Tristram, Rev. H. B, *A Narrative of Efforts by the late Mrs. Bowen Thompson, for the Evangelization of the Syrian Females* (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1872).

xii + 348pp. Photograph of the subject.

Elizabeth Maria Bowen Thompson (1812/13-1869): missionary. Thompson, the daughter of a philologist and translator, came under revivalist influences in Scotland. In December 1850 she married the medical missionary Dr. James Bowen Thompson and joined him in his missionary work in Syria. After her husband's death, she continued missionary activities in London before leaving for Beirut after the Mount Lebanon and Damascus massacres. She opened numerous schools for Syrian children and worked with women widowed by the civil war.

Henry Tristram Baker (1822-1906): geologist and naturalist. Baker's publications include *The Great Sahara* (1860) and studies of the flora and fauna of the Middle East. His other interest was in missionary work, and one of his daughters was the missionary and teacher Katherina Alice Salvin Tristram. His numerous scientific and travel works were popular and accessible.

The biography is mostly composed of extracts from the subject's letters, with very little connecting narrative except for the introductory background of 47 pages. It is one of the weaker missionary biographies published during this period.

110.

Cash, James, *Where there's a will there's a way! or, Science in the cottage, an Account of the Labours of Naturalists in Humble Life* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1873).

vi + 224pp.

Collective biography: 'early english botanists', John Dewhurst, George Caley, Edward Hobson, John Horsefield, James Crowther, John Mellor, Richard Buxton, John Martin, John Martin, George Crozier, Thomas Townley, Elias Hall, Robert Dick, Thomas Edward, and others.

James Cash (fl. 1839-1909): botanist. James Cash also published on *The British Freshwater Rhizopoda and Heliozoa* (1905-9) for The Ray Society, of which he was a member.

In his preface, the biographer expresses a desire to save the memories of deserving working-class subjects from oblivion. He stresses how the men worked on science for its own sake and not to transgress social barriers, and indeed harmony between the classes is advocated, with a science as a space for communication and exchange. Thomas Edward was the only subject still alive at the time of publication. The work places more emphasis on discoveries and the scientific dimension of these lives than many biographies of working-class scientists (including those written by Smiles), which prefer to stress their subject's moral values instead.

111.

Menzies, Sutherland, *Political Women* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: xx + 311. Vol. 2: viii + 329. Reprinted in 1875.

Collective biography: Anne de Bourbon, The Duchess de Longueville, The Duchess de Chevreuse, The Duchess de Montbazon, Duchess de Longueville; Princess Palatine; Princess de Conde; Duchess de Chatillon. Mademoiselle de Montpensier; Madame de Montbazon; Mademoiselle de Montpensier; Wife of the Great Conde; Duchess of Portsmouth; Lady Churchill; Princess des Ursins; Anne de la Tremouille; Camerara-Mayor; Queen Marie Louise; Sarah Jennings; Abigail Hill; Queen Anne's Mistress of the Robes and the Duchess of Marlborough.

Sutherland Menzies (fl. 1838-83): writer. Menzies wrote textbooks for schoolchildren, including a *History of Europe from the decadence of the Western Empire to the Reformation* (1877) and histories of France, Germany and the Ottoman Empire for junior classes (1873). Her other biographical work includes *Royal Favourites*, published in 1865. Menzies is possibly the pseudonym for Elizabeth Stone (1808-76), and the author of *Hughes, the Wer-Wolf*, which appeared in *The Lady's Magazine and Museum* in 1838.

The biographer has chosen to select those women who have played the greatest, most influential part on the world stage. The sketches are intended to show the disastrous consequences of women meddling with public and political affairs and the catastrophic sacrifices made by those who attempt to transgress the proper female sphere. The introduction is a particularly disagreeable display of the separate spheres ideology. The work does not rely, unusually, on quotation and the work is mostly composed of the biographer's own narrative. It is an interesting feature of the work that many of the subjects are French.

112.

Barfoot, Reverend John, *A Diamond in the Rough; or, Christian Heroism in Humble Life. Being jottings concerning that remarkable peasant preacher, William Hickingbotham, of Belper, Derbyshire* (London: James Clarke & Co, 1874).

xiii + 145pp.

William Hickingbotham (n.d.): peasant preacher. Hickingbotham was a labourer in Derbyshire who, after a somewhat irreligious life, was converted by Methodist preaching and became in his turn a preacher.

John Barfoot (fl. 1867-74): clergyman. The Barfoots were a Methodist family in Northern England. Barfoot was a Primitive Methodist clergyman, was also interested in the relations between the government and Primitive Methodist schools and published *Day Schools under Government Supervision described; with reasons why Primitive Methodists*

should accept educational grants (1867). He also published a life of George Warren (1864 – see above).

The work is a religious biography, which quotes lines from Cowper's 1782 poem *Charity* beneath the title page. The biography presents its subject as a member of a tradition of humble Methodist preachers 'whose memories the Church will not willingly let die', and the work is principally interesting as a further example of this strong tradition. The biography is simply written.

113.

Johnson, Joseph, *Brave Women: who have been distinguished for Heroic Actions & Noble Virtues; who have exhibited fearless courage; stout hearts; and intrepid resolve* (Gall & Inglis: London, 1875).

248 pp.

Collective biography: Mrs. Mary Patton, Bona Lombardi Brunoro, Dona Maria, Joan of Arc, Epicharis 'the martyr' and Catharine 'the Heroic', Lady Anne Askew, Countess of Derby, Mary Washington, Catherine Alexiewna, Isabel Brown, Flora Macdonald, the Marchioness de Bonchamps, Madame Huber, Madame Roland, Lady Mary Shipley, Maria Donne, Ann Flaxman, Helen Walker, Cobbett's wife, Catherine Vassent, Countess of Cromartie and her nieces, the maid of Saragossa, Lady Sale, Felicie de Fauveau, Henrietta Feller, Hester Lane and Grace Darling.

Joseph Johnson (fl. 1862-75): biographer. Johnson's other works include *Clever Girls of our Time, and how they became famous women* (1863) and *The Interviews of Great Men* (1862).

The introduction insists that woman can be man's equal in strength and resolution. Despite this stance, the biographer maintains that the expression of woman's bravery can best be achieved in the domestic sphere. The work is intended to help women better endure trials and disappointments.

114.

Pattison, Mark, *Isaac Casaubon, 1559-1614* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875).

643pp.

Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614): classical scholar. Casaubon was born in Geneva. He occupied numerous scholarly posts, including professor of Greek at the Academy of Geneva, 1582-96; professor of classical letters at the University of Montpellier, 1597-9 and sub-librarian at the Royal Library in Paris, 1605-10. He lived in London from 1610 and became naturalised the following year. He continued to publish, and succeeded in writing only the first volume of a projected series on church history.

Mark Pattison (1813-84): scholar and college head. Pattison was educated by his father and developed an early passion for academia. He went on to Oriel College, Oxford, but was dissatisfied with his tutors. He became drawn to Tractarianism and accepted Newman's invitation to live with other graduates in Dr. Pusey's house in St. Aldate's. He began to publish articles in religious periodicals and wrote two biographies for Newman's *Lives of the English Saints* (1844-5). He was elected fellow of Lincoln College, was ordained deacon in 1841 and priest in 1843. Pattison lost the election of the headship of the college in 1851 to James Thompson though he became rector after Thompson's death in 1861. He distanced himself from his youthful enthusiasm for Tractarianism and increasingly devoted himself to researching and publishing on the history of classical learning. His scattered writings do little justice to the scholar once considered the most learned man in England.

The biographer, unusually, lists his sources at the beginning of the work, and the biography is interesting as a further attempt to provide biography with greater scholarly credentials. This is achieved, again unusually, in one volume rather than the far longer works of mid-century scholarly biography. The work is footnoted throughout. The biography is solid and competent, though it lacks liveliness.

115.

Smiles, Samuel, *Thrift* (London: John Murray, 1875).

384pp. Reprinted in 1876, 1877, 1897 and 1907.

Collective biography: well over a fifty subjects, both famous and obscure.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper *Leeds Times*, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson. Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2 – see above), and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859 – see above), a work that was founded on the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see below) and Robert Dick (1878 – see below).

The collective biography is organised under several categories: 'industry, 'habits of thrift', 'improvidence', 'means of saving', 'examples of thrift', 'methods of economy', 'economy in life-assurance', 'savings – Banks', 'little things', 'masters and men', 'the Crossleys – master and men', 'living beyond the means', 'great debtors', 'riches and charity', 'healthy homes', 'the art of living'. Though the biography picks up the usual Smilesian themes of self-help and temperance in all things, the work is narrower in its focus than many of Smiles's works and less engaging.

116.

Brewin, Robert, *Memoirs of Rebecca Wakefield, Wife of the Rev. T. Wakefield, United Methodist Free Churches Missionary in Eastern Africa* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1876).

197 pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1879 and 1888.

Rebecca Wakefield (1844-1873): missionary. Wakefield, daughter of a hosier, draper and Methodist local preacher, worked as the mistress of a school for 'young ladies' and lived with various relatives until her marriage in May 1869 to Thomas Wakefield (1836-1902), a missionary in East Africa. She travelled with him to Zanzibar in 1870 and accomplished the duties of a missionary wife, such as teaching the women sewing and singing at services. She died after giving birth to a son, who also died.

Robert Brewin (fl. 1865-91): Methodist minister. Brother was Rebecca's brother, and she lived with him between 1865 and 1870. He published numerous works on missionary activities, and his works include *The Martyrs of Golbanti: or missionary heroism in the lives of Rev. John and Mrs. Houghton* (1886), *The Palms, or Stories of Sierra Leone and its*

Missions (1889), and he edited *Welcome Words: A Magazine of Religious Literature and Missionary Information* between 1880 and 1891.

The biography is extremely readable, due in no small degree to the vivacity of the subject's letters, which focus less on religious preoccupations than the trials and delights of travel and missionary life. This work, like Giberne's biography of A.L.O.E., shows a sharp division between the subject's pre-missionary and post-missionary life, when her voice becomes more present. The work contains numerous illustrations, which offers a parallel narrative of English imperialism. It is one of the better biographies of female missionaries.

117.

Smiles, Samuel, *Life of a Scotch Naturalist: Thomas Edward, Associate of the Linnean Society* (London: John Murray, 1876).

xxxv + 392pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1877 (fifth edition), 1878, 1882 and 1891.

Thomas Edward (1814-86): shoemaker and naturalist. Edward was the son of a Scottish militiaman and weaver. He abandoned school in his youth and found work in a tobacco factory, before becoming apprenticed to a shoemaker at the age of eleven. Edward was dissatisfied with his cruel master and worked for a time in the Aberdeenshire militia, but returned to shoemaking in Banff. He married Sophia Reid in 1837 and together they raised eleven children. Though living in dire poverty and working long hours, Edward pursued his passion for natural science, which he had cultivated since his youth. He spent his evenings and nights collecting specimens. He exhibited his collections in Aberdeen in 1846 but the exhibition was a failure. Though discouraged, he began to publish scientific articles in local newspapers. He grew to notoriety following Smiles's biography, received a civil-list pension of £50 a year, and became vice-president of the Banffshire Field Club, founded in 1880.

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Thomas Edward was still alive when Smiles prepared and published his biography, and the biographer based his narrative on autobiographical accounts provided to him by the subject, which he then remoulded considerably. Since the work was partly intended to disprove condemnations of Smiles as a promoter of mercenary motives, Smiles is keen to stress that Edward never left his humble sphere. The biography is engaging, and uses the idea of the picturesque to draw the reader in, together with illustrations by George Reid that became successful in their own right. Edward tried to gain from his notoriety after the publication of the work, and Smiles prevented his attempts to publish his own scientific and autobiographical works.

118.

Trevelyan, George Otto, *The Life and Letters of Macaulay, by his nephew* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1876), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 475pp. Portrait of subject. Vol. 2: 480pp. Reprinted in 1877, 1881, 1886, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1900, 1908, 1913, 1928, 1932 and 1978.

Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59): historian. The celebration historian published his best-selling *History of England* between 1849 and 1855. His *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) and *Essays Critical and Historical* (1843) were also extremely successful.

Sir George Otto Trevelyan (1838-1928): politician and writer. Trevelyan was the nephew of Thomas Babington Macaulay, with whom he spent much time in his youth. After leaving Cambridge he travelled to India, published some verse and articles, and *The Competition Wallah* (1864), which reflects on the life of an Indian civil servant. Trevelyan became elected MP for Tynemouth in 1865, and MP for the Hawick district of the Border burghs in 1868. He held several other posts in government, including chief secretary in Ireland from 1882. His other publications include the *Early History of Charles James Fox* (1880) and a six-volume history of the American War of Independence (1899-1914).

Trevelyan uses the traditional method in the biography of letting the subject 'speak for himself' through letters and journals, with only a bare connecting narrative. The liveliness of Macaulay's voice makes this method a success where it often failed with less engaging subjects. The work is often praised as one of the better examples of Victorian biography.

119.

Armstrong, George Francis (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Edmond J. Armstrong* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1877).

565pp. Portrait of subject.

Edmond John Armstrong (1841-65): poet. Armstrong was born and raised in Dublin. He developed a passion for literature in his youth, together with a growing religious scepticism that resulted in his avowed atheism. Armstrong's successful studies were interrupted by ill health, and he began to travel and write poems. He resumed his studies in 1862 and grew to prominence. G. L. Craik, then professor of English literature, compared his work to the early efforts of Shelley and Keats. He died having never published his poems, which were circulated posthumously by his brother.

George Francis Savage Armstrong (1845-1906): poet. Armstrong was born and raised in Dublin. He was the brother of Edmond J. Armstrong. Armstrong published his first volume of verse at the age of twenty-eight, *Poems Lyrical and Dramatic* (1869), and a tragedy in 1870. He became professor of history and English literature in Queen's College, Cork. Further tragedies, essays and poems followed. His numerous works were traditional, and criticised by W. B. Yeats, who condemned Armstrong's opposition to the Irish revival.

The subject's friends and family set about increasing Armstrong's reputation, since his poems had only been circulated amongst family and friends – G. L. Craik compared him to both Shelley and Keats. One interest of the work is the manner in which the subject's increasing literary abilities went hand in hand with an increasing scepticism towards religion. The work contains a condemnation of religious eccentricities, and of Edward Irving in particular.

120.

Balfour, Clara Lucas, *Women Worth Emulating* (London: Sunday School Union, 1877).

vii + 123 pp.

Collective biography: Mrs. Mary Somerville; Charlotte Elliott; Caroline Herschel; Elizabeth Smith; Amelia Opie; Sarah Martin and the last Duchess of Gordon; Jane and Ann Taylor.

Clara Lucas Balfour [*née* Clara Lucas] (1808-78): writer and temperance worker. Balfour was born into a humble but educated family. She came to prominence, and became patronized by the Carlyles, through her attack on Owenism, *Common Sense versus Socialism*. Her temperance work was partly fuelled by her experience of her husband's excessive drinking and became the president of the British Women's Temperance Association in 1877. She expanded her lectures on alcohol to include discussions of history, biography and women's rights and became a professional lecturer and writer on a wide variety of subjects.

This work is one of a number of collective female biographies penned by Balfour. As with many such works, it aims to stimulate emulation in its (young) readers. The language is simple and replete with exclamations and interrogations as if it were intended to be read aloud. It is a less interesting work than Balfour's *Working Women* (1854 - see above).

121.

Murch, Jerom, *Mrs. Barbauld and her contemporaries: sketches of some eminent literary and scientific englishwomen* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1877).

176 pp.

Collective biography: Miss Hannah More, Miss Jane Austen, Miss Edgeworth, Mrs Marcet, Miss Mitford, Miss Jane Porter, Madame d'Arblay, Mrs Elizabeth Montagu, Miss Berry, Miss Joanna Baillie, Mrs Barbauld, Mrs Trimmer, Mrs Piozzi, The Miss Lees, Mrs Radcliffe, Lady Morgan, Mrs Somerville and Miss Caroline Herschel.

Jerom Murch (1807-95): clergyman. Murch was the son of a tinsmith and ironmonger. He was a pastor at the Unitarian chapel, Diss, in Norfolk, from the age of twenty-two, and pastor at Trim Street Chapel in Bath between 1833 and 1846. He was also the President of the Bath Literary and Philosophical Association and worked at intervals as president of the local Mechanics' Institute, and president of numerous local cultural societies. He became mayor of Bath and regularly held the post between 1863 and 1893. Murch's other published works include sermons and *A History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England* (1835).

The work started as the last of four papers read at the Bath Institutions. The collective biography reflects on the continuing lack of recognition for many women of letters of the early nineteenth century, who achieved success despite disadvantages and prejudice. The work considers itself to be filling an enduring paucity of biographical and critical discussions of female writers. More recent female writers are deemed to suffer from fewer social obstacles.

122.

Thorne, Samuel Lay, *The converted wrestler, or the life of Abraham Bastard* (London: Elliot Stock, 1877).

46pp. Reprinted in 1880.

Abraham Bastard (1789-?) was born in Cornwall, the son of pious farmers. He lived a profligate youth and gained fame as a wrestler before being converted by the preacher Betsy Reed. He became a local preacher with the Bible Christians.

Samuel Lay Thorne (fl. 1860-77): clergyman. Thorne was born into a prominent Bible Christian family. He became a minister and was a popular preacher, and also published biographies of the printer Samuel Thorne (1875), and funeral sermons on W. O'Bryan (1868) and Mrs. C. O'Bryan (1860).

The biographer attempts to establish a poetic and picturesque tone in the opening lines, though this becomes lost in the ensuing sketch, which conventionally describes the subject's change from a state of sin to a state of grace.

123.

Walker, Mrs Abney, *The rest attained: in memoriam John Robertson, M.D., Kelso (Edinburgh: Maclaren & Macniven, 1877).*

43 pp. Photograph of subject.

John Robertson (1821-75): surgeon. Robertson was born in Edinburgh. He attended a public school until his fifteenth year. Robertson studied surgery and medicine, and obtained a degree from the College of Surgeons in 1842. He began work as the assistant of Dr. John Coldstream, a Christian man. He married Miss Stevenson, and the couple moved to Kelso in 1859. Robertson worked there for more than sixteen years before dying, after an accident involving a gig.

Mrs. Abney Walker (n.d.): Robertson's sister. This appears to have been her only publication.

The work is a domestic biography, simple and pious, and presented as a means of glorifying God's name and preserving the subject's name. The biographer claims her own inadequacy as a biographer. She avoids quoting too extensively from the subject's letters, as 'these letters are of a private nature, and would not interest the general reader', though, ironically, half of the sketch does consist of letters. The rest of the biography is a drawn-out account of Robertson's death and the mourning of his relatives.

124.

Dering, Edward Heneage, *Memoirs of Georgiana, Lady Chatterton. With some passages from her diary* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1878).

x + 312 pp. Reprinted in 1901.

Henrietta Georgiana Marcia Lascelles, Lady Chatterton [*née* Iremonger, *other married name* Dering] (1806-1876): writer. Lady Chatterton published works of travel writing, novels, biography and religious works. After the death of her husband, Sir William Abraham Chatterton, in 1855, she married Edward Heneage Dering (*b.* 1827), later to be her biographer. Chatterton followed her husband into the Roman Catholic Church in 1875.

Edward Heneage Dering (1827-?): writer. Dering was the son of the rector of Pluckley, Kent and prebendary of St Paul's, John Dering. He became a Roman Catholic in 1865 shortly before his wife, the subject, Henrietta. He published novels, such as *A Great Sensation* (1862) and 'The Atherstone Series' of novels (1890-4). He also published poems, including *The Chieftain's Daughter* (1870), and translations. Dering, his wife, Marmion Edward Ferrers and his wife Rebecca Dulcibella Owen lived as a famous *ménage à quatre* at Baddesley. After the deaths of Dering's wife and of Marmion, Edward married Rebecca.

The biography is marked, and marred, by the awkward movement between the biographer's and the subject's voice, to the extent that it is at times hard to distinguish between them. The biographer frequently uses the term 'we' and stresses the interconnectedness of their lives. Much of the latter half is taken up by long letters, notably by Bishop Ullathorne, on doctrinal matters. A few letters by Cardinal Newman on the subject's literary endeavours are also included. The main focus of the biography is on the religious

growth of the subject rather than upon her literary career, which the biographer acknowledges to have been somewhat mediocre.

125.

Smiles, Samuel, *Robert Dick, Baker of Thurso, Geologist and Botanist* (London: John Murray, 1878).

xx + 436pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1905.

Robert Dick (1810/11-1866): baker, geologist and botanist. Dick was born in Scotland and, in his youth, suffered from the cruel treatment of his stepmother. He was apprenticed to a baker from the age of thirteen, and combined long hours with autonomous study in natural history and the collecting of specimens. Dick was impressed by Hugh Miller's *Old Red Sandstone* (1841) and began a correspondence with him. This drew him into a circle of naturalists, both self-taught and from the more educated classes, that included Sir Roderick Murchison and Charles Peach (1800-86). Dick never published on his own account but gained notoriety for his scientific knowledge.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper *Leeds Times*, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson. Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2 – see above), and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859 – see above), a work that was founded on the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see above) and Robert Dick (1878).

Smiles described this work as a labour of love, and, after his unpleasant experiences with his earlier subject Thomas Edward, was reassured in taking on a subject who had died. The work, however, is overall less striking than the biography of Thomas Edward. Though it relies in a similar manner on picturesque descriptions, tales of perseverance and humility, an eccentric subject and his encounters with more educated and notorious scientists, the subject is in fact less complex.

126.

Atkinson, Sarah, *Mary Aikenhead: Her Life, Her Work, and Her Friends* (London: Burns & Oates, 1879).

vi + 512 pp. Portrait of subject. Published simultaneously in Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son. Reprinted in 1882 and 1911.

Mary Frances Aikenhead (1787-1858): Roman Catholic nun. Aikenhead was raised by a physician who was a member of the Church of Ireland and a Catholic mother. She entered the Catholic faith herself in July 1802. After her novitiate in York, Daniel Murray placed her in 1815 at the head of the new religious community, the Irish Sisters of Charity. Aikenhead's work included visiting the poor and supervising new recruits. She opened a number of new foundations despite suffering from increasing physical disabilities. A decree outlining the cause for her beatification in Rome was issued in 1921.

Sarah Atkinson (1823-93): Irish philanthropist and writer. Atkinson engaged actively in the reform of workhouses for girls and established the St. Joseph's Industrial Institute in Dublin, which trained these girls for domestic service. Her numerous publications, which included art and travel writing, appeared anonymously. She was a friend of Katharine Tynan, who wrote the biography of Mother Mary Xaveria Fallon (1891 - see below).

This biography of a fellow-Catholic is introduced by a lengthy chapter on Irish history and anti-Catholic prejudice, and contains strong patriotic tones. This introduction creates a parallel between the preservation of national history and the preservation of female lives. The work, which received good reviews, is well written and is particularly lively in its first half. The biographer's voice is strong and not over-swamped by letters and documents.

127.

Benham, Rev. William, *Catharine and Craufurd Tait, Wife and Son of Archibald Campbell, Archbishop of Canterbury: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1879).

xiii + 640pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1882.

Catharine Tait (1819-78): philanthropist. Tait was a philanthropist, brought up Evangelical but increasingly seduced by Tractarianism. She nevertheless married the anti-Tractarian Archibald Campbell Tait, headmaster of Rugby school. She participated in the school work, and later engaged in philanthropic activities when her husband became Dean of Carlisle in 1849, and bishop of London in 1856. These included workhouse and hospital visiting, securing cholera victims and mentoring orphans. Her account of the death of five daughters from scarlet fever became a bestseller of Victorian consolation literature.

Reverend William Benham (1831-1910): Church of England clergyman. Benham was born into a modest family of postmasters but the local rector provided him with a sound education, and he was taught theology by F. D. Maurice at King's College London. He became deacon in 1857, priest the following year, and taught both theology and literature. He became editorial secretary for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1864, and as such was responsible for disseminating an impressive number of religious biographies. Benham became close to Archibald Campbell Tait, who made him one of the six preachers of Canterbury, and later vicar of Margate (where he became a confidant of Dickens's mistress Ellen Ternan). Benham published a life of Archibald Campbell Tait in 1891. He obtained several other influential positions in the Church, published numerous religious works, and achieved significant influence.

The biography is a joint life of the philanthropist and her beloved only son who died in 1878. The biographer justifies his work by drawing attention to the desires of the surviving family, who saw in their departed an example for others to follow. The work is heavily dependent upon Archibald Campbell Tait's own reminiscences, and is pious in tone throughout. It is as close as possible to being a domestic biography without actually being one.

128.

Clayton, Ellen C., *Female Warriors: Memorials of Female Valour and Heroism, from the mythological ages to the present era* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1879), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 222pp. Vol. 2: 203pp.

Collective biography: numerous subjects, encompassing mythology, Greek and Ancient women, individuals from the Amazons, South Africa and Europe.

Ellen Creathorne Clayton [*married name* Needham] (1834-1900): writer. Clayton moved in her childhood from Dublin to London. She contributed from an early age to periodicals begun by her father, an engraver and illustrator. She studied art and signed a

petition for the full admission of women to the schools of the Royal Academy of Arts. She left her artistic studies behind to write a series of female biographies and 'Notable Women' for young girls. Other works of collective biography included *Women of the Reformation* (1861), *Celebrated Women* (1875), *Queens of Song* (1863), which sketched the lives of female opera singers, and *English Female Artists* (1876). Clayton also published novels, with varying success.

Female Warriors adopts a vigorous tone, and its introduction sets out its defiance of 'Mrs. Grundy' and 'Popular Prejudice'. The sketches include those of women to be deemed abhorrent and others to be admired. Predictably, there is less emphasis here on the domestic than in many works of collective female biography and, indeed, Clayton's other works. The work shocked some reviewers.

129.

Dorling, William, *Henry Vincent: a Biographical Sketch...With a preface by Mrs. Vincent* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1879).

80pp. Reprinted 1986.

Henry Vincent (1813-78): radical. Vincent was the son of a London goldsmith and silversmith. Vincent was largely self-taught. He was apprenticed to a printer from the age of fifteen, and worked at Spottiswoode's, the king's printers, from 1833. Vincent became interested in radical politics during his apprenticeship. He was elected vice-president of a local group devoted to Thomas Paine. He joined the London Working Men's Association in 1836, became a popular as a lecturer, and was the chief speaker at the 1838 Chartist meeting in London. He founded the weekly *Western Vindicator* in 1838. Vincent was arrested for 'riotous assemblage' in 1839 amidst a great outcry and the trial was heavily publicised, and outrage led to armed risings of Chartists in 1839 in Newport, which led to the death of ten rioters. Vincent was sentenced to twelve years and was remitted in 1841. He continued to lecture and publish after his release, and tried, unsuccessfully, to gain a seat in parliament. He later toured in the United States and England.

William Dorling (fl.) writer. Dorling also published biographies of George Newton Day (1890) and Dora Greenwell (1885), together with a number of sermons.

The biography is unusual in being the life of a political, working-class man that contains almost no mention of Christianity. The preface by the subject's wife, Lucy Vincent, provides a Christian framework that is then abandoned by Dorling. The wife's testimony is used to allow the biographer to make similarly large claims for his subject: Lucy insists that her husband dared 'to resist oppression when resistance was dangerous'. The work is simply told and readable, though on the whole unremarkable.

130.

Hutch, William, Mrs. Ball: *Foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland and the British Colonies (There called Sisters of Loretto). A Biography* (London: James Duffy and Sons, 1879).

590 pp.

Frances Ball [*name in religion* Mary Teresa] (1794-1861): Roman Catholic nun. Ball was born and raised in Dublin. She was educated at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin in York and was encouraged by Daniel Murray, upon her return to Ireland, to superintend a female teaching order, which became known as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was professed in 1816 and began organising the community at Rathfarnham. Her activities ranged from opening a poor school to designing plans for a church. She later supervised the opening of sister foundations abroad, including in India and Canada.

William Hutch (fl. 1875-83): clergyman and writer. Hutch became the Venerable Archdeacon William Hutch of Midleton, Co. Cork, in the early twentieth century. He also published a biography of Nano Nagle (1875) and translations from Italian, including J. Frassinetti's *The New Parish Priest's Practical Manual* (1883).

Hutch approaches his subject as a hidden life. Unlike Coleridge's biography, the work is heavily patriotic and includes vehement anti-English sentiments. The work is readable and lively, though lapses regularly into over-flowery language. Hutch interprets events (such as miracle-like divine interventions) in a manner that appears highly questionable when placed next to Coleridge's more sober account. Hutch demonstrates an attraction towards the more ritualistic, poetic aspects of Roman Catholicism, and an interest of the work lies in the framing of a woman's life within such a sensory and even sensual environment.

131.

Eastlake, Lady, Mrs Grote. *A Sketch* (London: John Murray, 1880).

vi + 159 pp.

Harriet Grote [*née* Lewin] (1792-1878): woman of letters. Mrs. Grote displayed originality of appearance and personality from her youth. She married the historian and radical George Grote in 1820 and gained a thorough acquaintance through him of politics and economics, together with a large circle of intellectuals. Grote was elected to parliament in 1832 and Mrs. Grote became deeply involved in his political endeavours - she became nicknamed the 'Queen of the Radicals'. Her later years were largely devoted to managing her husband's posthumous reputation.

Elizabeth Eastlake [*née* Rigby] (1809-93): journalist. Eastlake was Grote's close friend for a many years. A leading female journalist, she was at the centre of the main liberal and dissenting intellectual circles of the period, and published extensively on art and literary matters, notably as a regular contributor to the *Quarterly Review*. She achieved further notoriety through her condemnation of *Jane Eyre* as 'anti-Christian' and her involvement in the Effie Ruskin scandal as Effie's confidante. Her numerous publications include a *Handbook of the History of Painting, Part I: The Italian Schools* (1851), a study of Christian iconography, and translations.

The biography is very lively and makes full use of the Grotes's famous acquaintances. The pace is rapid, almost breathless, and it is similar to O'Meara's *Madame Mohl* (1885 - see below) in its unapologetic display of its female subject's strong voice and *bons mots*. The biographer is almost reluctant when forced to dwell upon the subject's more serious works and ideas, and clearly senses that the reader is more interested in the gossip. The work also contains a vivid representation of Mr. Grote, and it is almost more a portrait of a marriage, though it does not reveal the extent of the emotional rift that developed between the pair later in their marriage.

132.

Lonsdale, Margaret, *Sister Dora. A Biography* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880). Seventh edition.

258 pp. Reprinted in 1887.

Dorothy Wyndlow Pattison [*known as* Sister Dora] (1832-1878): Anglican nun and nurse. Pattison was raised by evangelical parents in Yorkshire, including an obsessively authoritarian father. Dorothy was educated by her brother, the critic Mark Pattison. She joined an Anglican Sisterhood in 1864, and helped to work with nurses at the cottage hospital in Walsall and became extremely proficient as a surgical nurse. Her relationship with the

religious sisterhood was strained and she broke with them in 1875. Following her death from breast cancer, her funeral was attended by the whole town but by no immediate family.

Margaret Lonsdale (1846-?): writer and nurse. Lonsdale was the daughter of John Gylby Lonsdale (1818-1907), the canon of Lichfield cathedral. She appears to have been a member of the Gosling society led by Charlotte Yonge, and went by the name of Magpie. Lonsdale was a probationer nurse at St. Guy's hospital as a lady-pupil in Dr Habershon's ward. She served there for only two months and behaved badly in her first six weeks, to such an extent that Habershon demanded her expulsion, unsuccessfully. Lonsdale began a correspondence in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1880 in which she attacked the ongoing use of untrained sisters and a general condemnation of the health system and began a widespread controversy. She also published *The Care and Nursing of Children in Health and in Sickness* (1885). Lonsdale also published *George Eliot: Thoughts Upon Her Life, Her Books, and Herself* (1886). She was an acquaintance of the subject, who once called upon her help when her governess fell ill.

The work is a curious biography, as atypical as its subject and its biographer. The biographer does not hold back in depicting a conflicted, tormented nature, and the strong voice of the nun. The biographer's tone wavers between admiration and the cautiously critical, and Lonsdale is clearly both fascinated and appalled by her subject. The style is anecdotal and lively. The intriguing and unusual portrait is marred by accounts of the subject's miraculous feats that seriously damage the credibility of the work.

133.

Page, H. A., *Leaders of Men: a Book of Biographies specially written for Youth* (London: Marshall Japp & Company, 1880).

398pp.

Collective biography: the Prince Consort, Robert Dick, Commodore Goodenough, George Moore, John Duncan, Samuel Greg, Dr John Wilson, Dr Andrew Reed and Lord Lawrence.

Alexander Hay Japp [*pseudo.* H. A. Page] (1836-1905): writer and publisher. Japp was the son of a Scottish carpenter. He began work as a bookkeeper from 1834. He worked briefly in London from 1837 but soon returned to Scotland. He settled once more in London from 1864, and worked with the *Daily Telegraph* and as adviser to the firm of Alexander Strahan. He also worked on the periodicals *Good Words*, *Contemporary Review* and *Sunday Magazine*, and worked on the *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*. He founded his own publishing firm, Marshall, Japp & Co., in 1880, and the business was sold to T. Fisher Unwin two years later. Japp used numerous pseudonyms, under which he published didactic works, fiction, verse and religious works. His other works of didactic biography include *Noble Workers: a Book of Examples for Young Men* (1875). He also published lives of Nathaniel Hawthorne, (1872), Thomas de Quincey (1877) and Thoreau (1878). He was also a close friend of Robert Louis Stevenson and the biographer William Jolly.

The work is a largely unremarkable example of exemplary biography aimed at youth. It demonstrates the tendency in collective biography to unite subjects otherwise vastly different in social status – royalty jostles with bakers here. The work is also of interest in showing the impact of Samuel Smiles's biography of Robert Dick, published in 1876, and in showing William Jolly's preparation for his own life of John Duncan, of which the sketch included here is an early draft.

134.

Pitman, Emma Raymond, Mrs., *Heroines of the Mission Field. Biographical Sketches of Female Missionaries who have laboured in various lands among the heathen* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1880).

xvi + 368pp.

Collective biography: Mary Moffat, Maria Regina Christina Gobat, Hannah Catherine Mullens, Emily C. Judson, Mary Williams, Fidelia Fiske, Mary M. Ellis, Dorothy Jones, Jane Chalmers, Anna Hinderer, Sarah Smith, Rebecca Wakefield, Susan B. Higgins, Hannah Kilham, Mary Hope, Ann H. Judson, Valentine of Jeypore, Harriet Newell, Margaret Wilson, Laetitia A. Campbell, Martha Jowett, Mrs Krusé, Mary Gunson, Mrs Krapp, Eliza Ann Foster, Louisa Gomez, Mary Cryer and Margaret Burton.

Emma Raymond Pitman (1841-?): biographer and missionary historian. Little is known of Pitman, who served for a time as a governess, an experience she describes in *My Governess Life* (1883). She became a prolific author of missionary biographies, and her works include *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880 – see above), accounts of Mary B. Baldwin (1881 – see above), *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands* (1889 – see below), *Lady Hymn Writers* (1892) and *Missionaries Heroines in Eastern Lands* (1895 – see below).

The work is introduced by a short essay on female missionary work. The introduction depicts in strong tones the value of female missionary work and pays homage to these women who ‘laboured in obscurity’. The work is heavily illustrated and the religious dimension of missionary work is perhaps overshadowed by the exoticism of adventures in foreign lands.

135.

Beggs, Thomas, *Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mr. Alderman John Guest, F. S. A., of Rotherham, with selections from his poems and letters* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1881).

248pp.

Alderman John Guest (1799-1880): alderman. Guest worked as an apprentice to a grocery business, before working in a lawyer’s office. He rose to local prominence in Rotherham and entered a partnership with Richard Chrimes for the brass factory Guest and Chrimes in 1847. He became a councillor when the Rotherham Borough was incorporated and was named Alderman. He turned down an offer to become Mayor. A self-made man, he was considered an important local benefactor. He introduced building societies and an abstinence society. His publications include *Historic Notices of Rotherham* (1879).

Thomas Beggs (n.d.). Beggs published a range of works on crime and punishment, including *An Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of Juvenile Depravity* (1849), *Crime: its causes and remedies* (1858) and *The Capital Punishment Commission* (1866).

The biography grew out of a discussion between the subject’s friends regarding an adequate memorial for Guest, and they sought a ‘permanent’ memorial. There is an amateur quality to the work, brought out as the biographer explains why he was singled out to write the work. The biography is intended to display, through a depiction of the subject’s many qualities, the strength that resides within English homes. The biography is also a celebration of the local, and becomes a kind of collective biography of a network of neighbours and friends. It is also of interest as a parallel account of the temperance movement.

136.

Coleridge, Henry James, *The Life of Mother Frances Mary Teresa Ball, Foundress in Ireland of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (London: Burns and Oates; Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1881).

xx + 368 pp.

Frances Ball [*name in religion* Mary Teresa] (1794-1861): Roman Catholic nun. Ball was born and raised in Dublin. She was educated at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin in York and was encouraged by Daniel Murray, upon her return to Ireland, to superintend a female teaching order, which became known as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was professed in 1816 and began organising the community at Rathfarnham. Her activities ranged from opening a poor school to designing plans for a church. She later supervised the opening of sister foundations abroad, including in India and Canada.

Henry James Coleridge (1822-93): Jesuit and writer. Henry James was the great-nephew of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He became attracted to the Tractarian movement at Oxford, and formed a close friendship with John Henry Newman. Coleridge became a Roman Catholic in 1852 and a Jesuit priest in 1855. He wrote numerous works, from theological reflections such as *The Prisoners of the King: Thoughts on the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory* (1878) to biographies, including the life of St. Francis Xavier (1872). He worked as editor of *The Month* from 1865 until 1881, and redirected it as a Jesuit publication, in which Newman's work frequently appeared.

The biography begins by justifying an Englishman's decision to write the life of an Irish nun, which recalls the heavily patriotic element of Irish religious biographies at the time. The work can be compared to William Hutch's 1879 biography of Frances Ball (see above). Coleridge's biography is much dryer in tone, and is more concerned with the history of the various institutes, within which Ball's personal history is at times swamped. Male agency (notably that of Daniel Murray) is here given more importance than in most biographies of nuns.

137.

French, Alfred J. Rev., *The Life of John Birchenall, M.R.C.S., F.L.S., of Macclesfield. Including Autobiography, Extracts from Diary, Sketches, Aphorisms, etc. With an Introduction by J. H. Rigg* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1881).

x + 310pp. Photograph of subject.

John Birchenall (1800-80): surgeon. Birchenall was born in Macclesfield, the eldest of thirteen children. His father was a cotton manufacturer and a local preacher with the Methodist church. Birchenall considered foreign missionary work as a career but trained as a surgeon instead. He became a member of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Reverend Alfred J. French (fl. 1869-1903): religious writer and scientist. French was tutor in mathematics and philosophy at Didsbury College near Manchester. He published a small handful of short religious publications, including *The World in the Church* (1889), and translations from French religious works, such as *The Alpine Missionary* (1869) and of a biography of John Wesley by Matthieu Lelièvre (1871).

The work is a fairly typical religious biography. Though the subject was a surgeon, the narrative pays exclusive attention to his religious life. The biography is an attempt to provide Methodist biography with 'a new treasure' and testifies to the strong tradition of biography amongst Methodists. The work relies heavily on autobiographical extracts. As with other biographies of surgeons, the work is interesting for its wavering between different registers, and moving between Christian and scientific reflections.

138.

Jolly, William, *Robert Burns at Mossgiel; With Reminiscences of the Poet by His Herd-Boy* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1881).

127pp. Reprinted in 1977.

Robert Burns (1759-96): poet. Burns was born into a humble family but gained a sound education. After his father's death in 1784 he farmed with his brother in Mossgiel, where he wrote some of his most famous poetry, including 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Burns achieved immense popularity and, unlike other 'uneducated poets', his fame endured and his genius was recognised both during and after his lifetime.

William Jolly (fl. 1871-83): inspector of schools, scientist and writer. Little is known of Jolly's childhood, spent in Pollokshields. Jolly's principal employment was as Inspector of Schools for Inverness, and he published works on education, including a study of the phrenologist George Combe (1879). His interests included natural science. From 1871, he was a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He helped to run the Milport Marine Biological Station, acted as the first President of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club and became Vice-President of the Geological Society of Glasgow in 1885. He was a close friend of John Stuart Blackie (1809-95), who describes him as 'Hilarius' in *Altavona* (1882), and also a close friend of H. A. Page. He was also a keen enthusiast of literature, published works on Robert Burns and the literature of the Highlands, and became President of the Ruskin society in 1879.

The biography explores the relationship between environment and personality, and as such provided preparation for Jolly's later biography of John Duncan (1883 – see below), which is similarly concerned with the influence of environment. The preface provides an interesting use of scientific language to describe biography, and anticipates many later early twentieth-century discussions of the genre. As often with Jolly, this is also a quest biography in which the biographer describes himself visiting the scenes of his subject's life and encountering surviving friends and acquaintances. The picturesque is an important element of the work.

139.

Bishop, J. V., *She Walked with God, And Was Not, for God took her: Memorials of Mrs. Bass* (London: William Mack, 1882).

viii + 167 pages. Photograph of subject.

Matilda Bass [*née* Bishop] (1832-1880): tract distributor and Baptist preacher. Matilda was born in Staffordshire and was brought up as a strict formalist. The death of her brother Harry in 1855 intensified her religious feelings. She married James Bass the following year, and soon took up religious work, including the distribution of tracts, some of which she wrote herself, and preaching in halls and village meetings. Bass frequently visited the poor in her area in Olney, light a candle and begin to pray, and would regularly leave her husband behind to travel with other women as itinerant preachers. Her actions expanded the possibilities for Baptist women. In 1874 she set up Special Mission Services with her friend Miss Haddon. Bass published the volume of religious poems *Silent Ministry* in 1880, and it was reprinted the following year.

J. V. Bishop (n.d.): Matilda Bass's sisters. This appears to be her only published work.

The work is of little literary interest, and is clotted with excerpts of the subject's letters, papers and diary entries. The biographer is mostly concerned with listing the various places in which Bishop preached. Despite Bass's clearly assertive behaviour, the biographer is intent on stressing that Bass was 'womanly in every way'.

140.

Blind, Mathilde, *George Eliot* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1883).

vi + 218 pp. Reprinted 1884, 1888 and 2000.

George Eliot [Mary Ann, later Marian, Evans] (1819-80): novelist. Eliot worked as an assistant editor to the *Westminster Review* and had translated Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1854) before achieving fame as a novelist with *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Adam Bede* (1859). Though her later novels *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1862-3), *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* (1874-6) divided critical opinion, they confirmed her status as one of the age's leading novelists. Eliot's unmarried relationship with the writer George Henry Lewes (1817-78) caused some controversy, as did her short marriage to John Walter Cross (1840-1924), younger by twenty years, and her future biographer.

Mathilde Blind (1841-96): writer. Blind was born in Germany, the daughter of a Jewish banker. She became connected in political activities through her mother's second husband, Karl Blind, and moved to London after the 1848 revolutions, where she mingled with fellow refugees. She published poetry, including *The Ascent of Man* (1889) and *Birds of Passage* (1895). Blind was a Shelley enthusiast, and greatly interested in women's rights and education. Her translation of Strauss's *The Old Faith and the New* appeared in 1873. She moved amongst artistic circles, and was closely acquainted with Ford Madox Brown, the Rossettis and Swinburne.

Blind's work was the first full-length biography of George Eliot, and, part of the 'Eminent Women' series, it is keen to confirm the novelist's place in English literature. An engaging biography, it attempts analyses and critical assessments of Eliot's works, and demonstrates extensive research. The work has further interest through the similar intellectual interests of subject and biographer.

141.

By her sister, *Clear Shining Light: A Memoir of Caroline W. Leakey* (London: John F. Shaw and Co., 1882).

142 pp.

Caroline Woolmer Leakey (1827-81): writer. Caroline was the son of the painter James Leakey (1775-1865). She suffered from poor health from early childhood and throughout her life. She engaged in philanthropic endeavours when suffering a brief respite from her sufferings. Leakey began to write and publish poetry during a voyage to Van Diemen's Land which lasted from 1847 to 1853 in order to support her sister's family, and which further deteriorated her health. Upon her return to England she ran a school and later founded a home for fallen women. She pursued her literary career by publishing didactic magazine pieces and tracts. Her most important work was the novel *The Broad Arrow* (1859), which contains a plea for the treatment of convicts and attracted much critical attention.

Emily P. Leakey (fl. 1882-9): religious tract writer. Leakey, the sister of her subject Caroline, published a small number of religious tracts, such as *Dot your Prayers* (1888) and *Take it at once* (1889).

The biography is published by a religious publisher and the tone is excessively pious and eulogising. The work opens with the biographer anxiously seeking heavenly guidance for her work. The idea of the subject embarking upon a literary career from ambitious motives is avoided, and her writing is portrayed more as a hobby that ensued from a natural progression of events. It is overall poorly written, but is of some interest regarding representations of the female writer.

142.

Froude, James Anthony, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life, 1795-1835* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 432pp. Portrait of Thomas Carlyle. Vol. 2: 495pp. Portrait of Jane Carlyle. Reprinted in 1890, 1896, 1901, 1914 and 1969.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): essayist, historian and biographer. Carlyle was perhaps the pre-eminent influence on both Victorian biographies of 'great' lives and the lives of 'obscure' subjects. His own biographies were the life of Schiller (1823-4), a series of biographical lectures on *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841 – see above), the *Life of John Sterling* (1851 – see above) and a six-volume biography of Frederick the Great (1858-65 – see above). His essays on biography and history were also extremely important for later biographers.

James Anthony Froude (1818-94): historian and biographer. Froude's work as a novelist and historian has been overshadowed by the controversy surrounding his biography of Carlyle. Froude had already attracted controversy by collaborating with Cardinal Newman on the *Lives of the English Saints*, but above all by losing his faith altogether shortly after Newman's conversion. The novel that resulted from this experience, *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849) caused a huge outcry and a copy was publicly burnt at Oxford. Froude met Carlyle the same year, and was greatly influenced by the Prophet. He also edited *Fraser's Magazine*, to which Carlyle frequently contributed, and completed a 12-volume *History of England* (1856-70). He was given the Regius Chair of Modern History at Oxford in 1892.

The work is the first part of the biography that was the subject of the greatest debate surrounding biography and the invasion of private life during the Victorian period, though most of the controversial elements of the work appeared in the ensuing two volumes, published in 1884 (see below). The work itself is one of the finest examples of nineteenth-century biography. It opens with a striking defence of biography and biographical sincerity, following the confrontation statement that Carlyle expressed a desire that no biography should be written, and the biography as a whole is interspersed with reflections on what the public has a right to know of its eminent men. Froude intervenes throughout the narrative with gnomic comments and describes his role as that of a 'Greek chorus', a feature that was present in Carlyle's own biographical writings. The biographer also provides insightful comments on the genesis of Carlyle's works and the formation of his character, and the overall style is engaging.

143.

[Anonymous], *Memoir of Annie Keary* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1882).

250 pp. Reprinted in 1883.

Anna Maria Keary (1825-79): novelist and children's writer. Annie, the son of an Irish clergyman, was raised in a Yorkshire rectory and, later, in Bristol. She relieved the austerity of her childhood with a lively imaginative life shared with her sister Eliza. From 1848, Annie spent six contented years looking after a brother's children, but suffered from the death of her brothers and the termination of her own engagement. Throughout her literary career, she also took care of her ailing mother and her cousins. She wrote several children's books, including *The Rival Kings* (1858) and domestic novels. Annie achieved some success with *Castle Daly* (1875). Though she led a largely retiring life, she did make some literary friends, including Charles Kingsley. She died in France from breast cancer.

Eliza Harriott Keary (bap. 1827-1914): poet and children's writer. Eliza and her sister Annie Keary were very close, and collaborated on several literary works such as *Little*

Wanderlin and other Fairy Tales (1865). For a short time, the sisters also ran a home for unemployed female servants in London. Eliza also published the volume of poetry *Little Seal-Skin and Other Poems* (1874), which has attracted recent attention. Her other works include religious children's literature and editions of letters. Eliza also edited her sister's letters in 1883.

The biography, which was well reviewed, is particularly vivid and engaging in its first half, with its colourful representation of childhood. The work is strong when depicting the imaginative life, but is surprisingly abstract concerning dates and names. It offers an interesting portrayal of the divided nature of the woman writer, with some echoes of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, partly suggested by the similarities in the lives.

144.

Barbour, Margaret Fraser, *Memoir of Mrs Stewart Sandeman of Bonskeid...By her daughter* (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1883).

vi + 272pp. Portrait of the subject.

Margaret Sandeman [*née* Stewart] (1803-83): owner of Bonskeid House. Margaret was a descendant of the Stewart family, whose lineage reached back to King Robert the Bruce. In 1820 she married Glas Sandeman (1793-1855) against the will of her father, Alexander Stewart, who disinherited her of Bonskeid House. Yet when Alexander experienced financial difficulties, the couple came into possession of the property.

Margaret Fraser Barbour [*née* Sandeman] (1823-92): religious writer and owner of Bonskeid House. Margaret married George Freeland Barbour, a Manchester cotton manufacturer, in 1845. They in turn bought the house and lived there after the death of their son in a railway accident in 1874, of which Margaret published an account. George made numerous improvements and extensions to the property. Margaret published a number of religious memoirs, tales and advice, of which the most popular was *The Way Home. A Religious Manual for the Young* (1854).

The work is somewhat representative of the more simplistic type of domestic biography. The biographer's approach is entirely uncritical: Barbour is content to rehearse the facts of the life as simply as possible. The emphasis of the work is principally on the subject's Christian life. The work is heavily illustrated.

145.

Fullerton, Georgiana Charlotte, *The Life of Elisabeth Lady Falkland, 1585-1639* (London: Burns and Oates, 1883).

xv + 269pp.

Elisabeth Cary, Viscountess Falkland [*née* Tanfield] (1585-1639): writer and translator. Elisabeth was precocious and rapidly became fluent in French and Italian. She married Sir Henry Cary (c.1575-1633) in 1602. Two years later, she became the first female author to compose a drama in English. Though this remained in manuscript form, further plays and biographies of Edward II were published. The family suffered from financial difficulties and, from 1626, huge controversy when Elisabeth converted to Catholicism, for which Charles I temporarily kept her under house arrest and for which her husband demanded a separation. She incurred further wrath for publishing defences of Catholicism and arranging the conversion of her children. One of her daughters, who became a nun, compiled a manuscript biography of her in 1650.

Lady Georgiana Charlotte Fullerton [*née* Leeveson-Gower] (1812-85): novelist and biographer. Fullerton was the daughter of an ambassador and travelled extensively as a child. She married the embassy attaché Alexander George Fullerton (1808-97) in 1833. She

converted to Roman Catholicism in March 1846. Her religious experiences contributed to her eight successful novels, which combined religious sentiment with sensational elements, and the topic together with her style caused controversy. Fullerton also wrote biographies of Catholic subjects such as St. Frances of Rome (1855) and Louisa de Carvojal (1873). Her close friend, the French writer Mme. Augustus Craven (1808-91) wrote her first full-length biography, in French. Fullerton also engaged extensively in philanthropy, and gave most of the money she earned from her writing to charity. She co-founded the religious community of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God Incarnate.

The biographer reflects in the preface on the respective merits of biography and fiction, and finds that when biography also contains an account of trials and emotions its impact is stronger than fiction. Fullerton believes that contemporary women would find resonance in their own lives with that of her seventeenth-century subject. The work is drawn from the biography of the subject compiled by one of her daughters, and recently republished. The biography is well and simply written, and the biographer finds a good balance between excerpts from Falkland's autobiographical writings and her own commentary. The work is a good example of an early attempt to recover historical female lives, rather than simply contemporary ones.

146.

Gilchrist, Anne, *Mary Lamb* (London: W. H. Allen, 1883).

xii + 255pp. Reprinted in 1889 and 1972.

Mary Ann Lamb (1764-1847): children's writer. Mary is mainly remembered as the sister of Charles Lamb, and for having killed her mother during one of her recurrent bouts of insanity. Charles, to whom she was very close, took care of her for the rest of her life. Mary was nevertheless a talented writer, and wrote most of the popular prose *Tales from Shakespear* (1807) to which Charles also contributed. Her other works include *Mrs Leicester's School, or, The History of Several Young Ladies, Related by Themselves* (1809) and *Poetry for Children* (1809).

Anne Gilchrist [*née* Burrows] (1828-85): writer. Anne married the art critic and biographer Alexander Gilchrist (1828-61) in 1851. The Gilchrists were neighbours and close friends of the Carlyles. Anne helped to complete her husband's seminal biography of Blake following Alexander's death in 1861, with the help of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Anne Gilchrist also published essays, a translation of Hugo's *La Légende des Siècles* and a biography of Mary Lamb (1883 - see above). Anne cultivated many illustrious friendships, notably with the Rossettis, and Tennyson, but she became mostly known for her close friendship with and championing of Walt Whitman. Gilchrist planned, but never wrote, a biography of Dorothy Wordsworth.

The biography forms part of the 'Eminent Women' series. The work is extremely lively and readable, and gains enormously from Mary's own vivacious, gossipy letters. The work moves swiftly between public and more private, domestic concerns. Mary's madness is treated straightforwardly and sympathetically. The work demonstrates an obvious relish for female lives and friendships. The biography supports the more recent idea that female life-writing is concerned with cyclical narratives and the collective, rather than the linear and the individual. The biography, unusually for the life of a woman, includes a 'list of authorities'.

147.

Ingram, John H., *Oliver Madox Brown: A Biographical sketch, 1855-1874* (London: Elliot Stock, 1883).

x + 238pp. Portrait of subject.

Oliver Madox Brown (1855-74): artist and author. Brown was the son of the painter Ford Madox Brown (1821-93). Though promising, Brown was difficult in his childhood and removed from the University College London junior school and was tutored by his father. He began to exhibit his work publicly from the age of thirteen, with the picture *The Infant Jason Delivered to the Centaur* (1869) and further works followed. He also provided illustrations for William Michael Rossetti's edition of the works of Lord Byron (1870). He turned increasingly towards poetry and began a prose tale, *The Black Swan*, in 1871, and a much-altered version, modified on the request of the publishers Smith and Elder, was published as *Gabriel Denver* (1873). Leslie Stephen was responsible for rejecting his second novel, *The Dwale Bluth*, submitted twice to the *Cornhill Magazine*. He died from the septicaemia caused by peritonitis.

John Henry Ingram (1814-1916): author and Edgar Allan Poe scholar. Ingram found employment in the Civil Service from 1868. Other than a volume on the haunted homes and families of Great Britain (1912), Ingram devoted his literary energies to literary biography, and wrote studies of Edgar Allan Poe (1886), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1888), Chatterton (1904) and Christopher Marlowe (1904). He edited the works of Poe in 1890.

The biographer was not personally acquainted with the subject, though he was helped with his composition by the Rossetti family. Ingram believes in hereditary genius and spends a large amount of the biography dwelling on the subject's childhood. He is also drawn to the picturesque. The work is far more descriptive, and makes less use of quotations from the subject's letters and journals, than was often the case with this type of subject. Though the work is lively and well paced, it is somewhat sentimental, and slightly cloying in its excessive concern with charm and sweetness.

148.

Jolly, William, *The Life of John Duncan, Scotch Weaver and Botanist, with sketches of his friends and notices of the times* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1883).

xix + 516pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1883.

John Duncan (1794-1881): hand-loom weaver and botanist. Duncan was an illegitimate child, the son of a soldier. He displayed an early interest in collecting specimens of flora and fauna but became apprenticed to a weaver at the age of fifteen. Duncan continued to pursue his scientific studies and was slowly taught to read by members of his community in Drumlithie. He moved to various locations in Scotland and accomplished a variety of employments, including a period in the Aberdeen militia, before settling at Droughsburn in 1852. Duncan's personal life was tumultuous. He married a woman, Margaret Wise, who had had an illegitimate son and whose further adultery Duncan later discovered. He found some consolation through an intense friendship he formed with the gardener and fellow amateur botanist Charles Black. Despite extreme poverty, they pursued their scientific studies, and it is estimated that Duncan succeeded in collecting specimens from two-thirds of British flora. Through his appearance and botanical enthusiasm Duncan gained the reputation of an eccentric in his community.

William Jolly (fl. 1871-83): inspector of schools, scientist and writer. Little is known of Jolly's childhood, spent in Pollokshields. Jolly's principal employment was as Inspector of Schools for Inverness, and he published works on education, including a study of the phrenologist George Combe (1879). His interests included natural science. From 1871, he was a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He helped to run the Milport Marine Biological Station, acted as the first President of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club and became Vice-President of the Geological Society of Glasgow in 1885. He was a close friend of John Stuart

Blackie (1809-95), who describes him as 'Hilarius' in *Altavona* (1882), and also a close friend of H. A. Page. He was also a keen enthusiast of literature, published works on Robert Burns and the literature of the Highlands, and became President of the Ruskin society in 1879.

Jolly's work appears to have been closely modelled on the biographies of humble naturalists published by Samuel Smiles. As with Smiles, Jolly makes extensive use of picturesque imagery (though his work, apart from a portrait of Duncan, is not illustrated) and is concerned with self-help values. Jolly provides an interesting commentary on working-class communities. The biography is saturated with imagery of sight, and is centrally concerned with perception. Jolly is a more indulgent biographer than Smiles, and is unafraid to tackle potentially controversial subjects such as the adultery of Duncan's wife. The biography is also a powerful account of an intense, Romantic male friendship, between Duncan and fellow scientist Charles Black.

149.

Robertson, Eric S., *English Poetesses: A Series of Critical Biographies, with Illustrative Extracts* (London: Cassell & Company, 1883).

xvi + 381pp.

Collective biography: Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, The Duchess of Newcastle, Early Minor Writers, Lady Mary Montagu, Mrs Piozzi, Hannah Cowley, Charlotte Smith, Mrs Barbauld, Anna Seward, Mrs Opie, Mary Lamb, Lady Grisell Baillie, Mrs Cockburn, Jane Elliot, Lady Anne Barnard, The Baroness Nairne, Joanna Baillie, Mrs Hemans, "L.E.L.", Adelaide Procter, Caroline Norton, Lady Dufferin, Mrs Southey, Mary Mitford, Sarah Flower Adams, Sara Coleridge, Mrs Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Menella Bute Smedley, Christina Rossetti, Emily Pfeiffer, Augusta Webster, Alice Meynell, Jean Ingelow, Harriet Hamilton King, Mathilde Blind, Mary Robinson and Other Writers.

Eric Sutherland Robertson (fl. 1883-1911): writer. Robertson's biographies include the lives of Longfellow (1887), a collective biography of great writers (1887) and a guide to Wordsworth's environment (1911). He also edited poetry anthologies.

The biographer here speaks in the first person and introduces the writers through his personal perspective and tastes. There is a description of him discovering old authors by delving amongst dusty books in a library that anticipates Leslie Stephen and, indeed, Virginia Woolf. The biographer makes some harsh judgements on 'unfeminine' writers – Aphra Behn, for example, is described as 'unsexed'. There is an attempt to balance biography with critical assessment, and, as the subjects become more recent, there is an increasing portion of critical appreciation.

150.

Thomas, Bertha, *George Sand* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1883).

vii + 247pp. Reprinted in 1889.

George Sand [Aurore Dupin, Baronne Dudevant] (1804-76): French novelist. Sand controversially separated from her husband and moved to Paris in 1831 to pursue her literary career. She gained fame for her romantic tales in which women rebel against social constraints, such as *Indiana* (1832), and for her rural idylls, such as *La Mare au diable* (1846) and *La Petite Fadette* (1848). Her tumultuous life included a passionate liaison with Alfred de Musset.

Bertha Thomas (fl. 1883-90): novelist. Thomas's works include the collection of tales *Camera Lucida; or, Strange Passages in Common Life* (1897) and the novels *Cressida* (1878), *Elizabeth's Fortune* (1887) and *Famous or Infamous* (1890).

The volume was part of the 'Eminent Women Series'. As with most works of the series (which includes Anne Gilchrist's life of Mary Lamb, published in 1883 – see above), the biography is well researched and engaging. Though the subject was a controversial one, Thomas skirts the controversy by stating that much of Sand's life cannot yet be uncovered as the principal characters are still alive. The life opens with the bold statement of Sand's genius, and the importance of Sand as a woman is stated only second. Chapters are devoted to her mental development and her works. As an account of a woman's writing life, the model is not extremely far from the biographies produced for the 'English Men of Letters' series. The biographer does not shy from giving a critical appreciation of Sand's political and literary ideas. Nevertheless, the final paragraph of the work emphasises, as so often with biographies of female writers, that Sand was above all a good woman who sought to do good deeds.

151.

Allen, Grant, *Biographies of Working Men* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1884).

191pp. Reprinted in 1885 and 1888.

Collective biography: Thomas Telford; George Stephenson; John Gibson; William Herschel; Jean-François Millet; James Garfield and Thomas Edward.

Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen (1848-99): science writer and novelist. Allen was born in Canada, the son of an Irish clergyman. When he was approximately fourteen his family moved to France, where Allen studied, followed by England, in Birmingham. After studying at Oxford, he found employment as a schoolmaster in England and, later, Jamaica. He published articles on science, and travel pieces. His scientific essays were praised by Charles Darwin and T. H. Huxley. Allen later began contributing, to leading periodicals, novels and poems that sold well, and that often included satires of the age. Allen is today remembered for his novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), which was a founding work of the 'new woman' genre of novel. Edward Clodd published his biography in 1900 (see below).

The sketches are well written and lively, though derived from prior, full-length biographies and inspired by them to such an extent that many passages are simple paraphrases. Allen departs from these sources, including Samuel Smiles and his *Life of a Scotch Naturalist*, to reflect on the social conditions that determine the opportunities available to working men. He praises Smiles for celebrating a life that was not motivated by external success. The sketches remove much psychological insight and are more concerned with facts and the didactic potential they have. It is one of the more readable examples of self-help literature aimed narrowly at working-class men.

152.

Blair, Richard S., *A Memoir of Billy Durrant, local preacher, bookseller and poet, compiled from his letters, journals, and poems* (London: Ralph Fenwick: 1884).

vi + 148pp.

Billy Durrant (fl. 1840): bookseller, Methodist preacher and poet. Durrant came from Bury St. Edmunds. He moved to Wickhambrook where he was responsible for creating a Methodist following, by initially holding services on the Green in 1840. He helped to found a Primitive Methodist Society.

Richard S. Blair (fl. 1874-84): religious writer. Blair wrote a number of minor religious works, including *Reaching the Masses* and *Light at Eventide*. He became a friend of Billy Durrant, whom he met in London in 1874.

The work is heavily autobiographical, somewhat justifying the term 'compiled', though there is a connecting narrative. The biographer's voice is nevertheless present, notably

when he explains that the biography is intended not for the 'critical' but for the 'common people'. The emphasis seems to be more on the preaching than the poetry, which is looked upon as something of a quaint eccentricity. The work is unusual in giving the physical description of the man in the introductory remarks, which also recount how the biographer and subject met. In later sections, the biographer surprises himself that he has gone on at such length, as if he were being seduced by his own subject.

153.

Buckland, Anna, *A Record of Ellen Watson* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884).

vi + 279 pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1886.

Ellen Watson (1856-80): scientist and writer. Watson was the daughter of a University College London tutor. She excelled in examinations and largely taught herself advanced mathematics. Her insistent demands on extended classes for women opened the way for other women. She was accepted to follow courses of high mathematics and physics at UCL, and followed artistic movements (she greatly admired George Eliot). Following failing health, she travelled to South Africa and worked there in teaching colonists' children, having briefly considered becoming a missionary. She penned a number of essays on Christian themes and women's education.

Anna Buckland (fl. 1880-1889): educational writer. Buckland was a childhood friend of Ellen Watson and also travelled to South Africa. She was also interested in educational writing and published a study on *The Happiness of Childhood* (1880), *The Teaching of English Literature* (1885), an account of *Our National Institutions: a short sketch for schools* (1886) and a volume of school addresses (1891). Her *Story of English Literature* (1882) was reprinted in 1889, 1904 and 1911.

The biography succeeds in being interesting, despite its rather lacklustre style, due to the intrinsic interest of the subject. The work is divided between her early work as a scientist, and later Christian activities. The biographer eagerly compensates for Watson's academic achievements with claims on her modesty – this is no manifesto for women's rights or education. The work depends increasingly on the subject's letters and writings. The work is interesting in its attempt to achieve a balance between depicting the subject's originality whilst displaying her as a safe example of womanhood.

154.

Carson, Harriet, *From the loom to the lawyer's gown, or self help that was not all for self: Being incidents in the life of Mr Mark Knowles, barrister-at-law* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1884).

110 pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1889 and 1892. The work was also translated into French.

Mark Knowles (c. 1833-?): lawyer and temperance advocate. Knowles was born around 1833, in a humble village of hand-loom weavers, and was a weak, almost crippled child. His mother was pious and instructed him in catechism and brought him up after his father's death when he was four. A new vicar paid for his schooling when he ten years old. He became a shop assistant in a Blackburn shop, became involved in Chartism and began to drink. He signed an abstinence pledge at the age of eleven and joined a mutual improvement society in 1846. In 1854 he was recruited by a Manchester shoe manufacturer in search of a cashier and went on to work as book-keeper in a wholesale grocery establishment. He invented a mechanical contraption and helped towards the creation of the 'Knowles and Blackburn's Compound Extracting Comb', which led to further inventions displayed in the

1862 great exhibition. An autodidact, he passed the Bar examinations and became a barrister. Knowles began to lecture on his past and advocated temperance.

Harriet Carson (fl. 1877-1889): didactic writer. Carson, who was blind, was also the author of *Tom Knight* (1877) and *A Railway Line to Fortune* (1881).

The biography is clearly intended as an inspirational and exemplary one. The barest outlines of Knowles' life and personality are given, and his life is used to express a wider argument in favour of temperance. The narrative is framed by two hymns. It is one of the more interesting of the short, 'exemplary', biographies, however. The book went into numerous editions. Unusually, it begins with a death scene. The account draws heavily on fictional techniques, including dialogue. Advice and admonitions, in a mode reminiscent of fairy-tales, are given three times. The writer, alongside this pious account, is clearly attracted to accounts of violence, and the narrative shows the influence of sensation fiction. The working classes are depicted as essentially brutish, stubborn, and easily led astray, and the biography contains a strong anti-Chartist passage.

155.

Froude, James Anthony, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of His Life in London, 1834-1881* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1884), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 460pp. Portrait of subject. Vol. 2: 486pp. Reprinted in 1885, 1890, 1891, 1897, 1911, 1919, and 1969.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): essayist, historian and biographer. Carlyle was perhaps the pre-eminent influence on both Victorian biographies of 'great' lives and the lives of 'obscure' subjects. His own biographies were the life of Schiller (1823-4), a series of biographical lectures on *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841 – see above), the *Life of John Sterling* (1851 – see above) and a six-volume biography of Frederick the Great (1858-65 – see above). His essays on biography and history were also extremely important for later biographers.

James Anthony Froude (1818-94): historian and biographer. Froude's work as a novelist and historian has been overshadowed by the controversy surrounding his biography of Carlyle. Froude had already attracted controversy by collaborating with Cardinal Newman on the *Lives of the English Saints*, but above all by losing his faith altogether shortly after Newman's conversion. The novel that resulted from this experience, *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849) caused a huge outcry and a copy was publicly burnt at Oxford. Froude met Carlyle the same year, and was greatly influenced by the Prophet. He also edited *Fraser's Magazine*, to which Carlyle frequently contributed, and completed a 12-volume *History of England* (1856-70). He was given the Regius Chair of Modern History at Oxford in 1892.

The work is the second part of the biography that was the subject of the greatest debate surrounding biography and the invasion of private life during the Victorian period. The later volumes of Froude's four-part biography of Carlyle were the principal focus of the controversy surrounding the work, as they dealt with Carlyle's marriage to Jane in greater detail and evoked the quarrels that occurred between them. (This was accompanied by another quarrel with Carlyle's relatives surrounding the copyrights of his works). The work itself is engaging and one of the finest examples of Victorian biography. Froude finds a good balance between quotations from Carlyle's letters and a biographical commentary that takes into account contemporary context. Froude's prose is lively and reflects Carlyle's own rejection of hagiographical, overly-respectable biographical writing.

156.

Pitman, Mrs. E. R., *Elizabeth Fry* (London: W. H. Allen, 1884).

viii + 208pp. Reprinted 1894 and 1889.

Elizabeth Fry [*née* Gurney] (1780-1845): penal reformer and philanthropist. Elizabeth was the daughter of a Quaker merchant and banker. Elizabeth took the Quaker sympathies of her family much further and became intensely religious. She married the Quaker Joseph Fry (1777-1861) in 1800. Fry began philanthropic work shortly after her marriage and accomplished a famous visit of Newgate prison. This interest expanded and took the form of the Ladies' Association for the Reformation of the Female Prisoners in Newgate, later known as the Ladies' Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners. She is one of the most frequent subjects of collective female biography published during the nineteenth century.

Emma Raymond Pitman (1841-?): biographer and missionary historian. Little is known of Pitman, who served for a time as a governess, an experience she describes in *My Governess Life* (1883). She became a prolific author of missionary biographies, and her works include *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880 – see above), accounts of Mary B. Baldwin (1881 – see above), *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands* (1889 – see below), *Lady Hymn Writers* (1892) and *Missionaries Heroines in Eastern Lands* (1895 – see below).

The work was published as part of the 'Eminent Women Series'. Unusually for Pitman's work, there are no illustrations. In the preface, the biographer attempts to create a place for the subject as a precursor of the woman's movement. It is a traditional biography, narrated in simple and sober language, with less of the militant tones of Pitman's other works. Other works in the series, such as Anne Gilchrist's biography of Mary Lamb (1883 – see above), are of greater interest from a literary perspective.

157.

[Anonymous] *In The Light: Brief Memorials of Elizabeth Phebe Seeley. By her sister* (London: The British Syrian Schools and Bible Mission, Seeley & Co., 1884).

xii + 278pp. Photograph of subject.

Elizabeth Phebe Seeley (1844-81): missionary. Elizabeth was a precocious child and began to write verses when she was thirteen. Severe rheumatism developed from the age of seventeen impeded her work yet she continued to teach until 1869. Her sister sailed for Beyrout as Secretary to the Mission of the British Syrian Schools and Elizabeth took over this role upon her sister's marriage. Her missionary work included examining schools and supervising classes, and she also engaged in translation work.

The biographer (n.d.) is the subject's sister and fellow missionary.

The biography invokes in the preface Ruskin's statement on the value of obscure lives to justify the work. Similarly, the biographer stresses the practical, commonplace aspects of missionary life. The biographer, unusually, provides little context or background on Syria. Events are underplayed, and the tone remains sober. The work is atypical of biographies of female missionaries – it offers very little context and background on the subject's chosen destination, is uninterested in the exoticism of foreign lands and provides little information on the journey. The biographer provides little sense of the subject having experienced life-changing events and what she does experience is underplayed. The work is prefaced by the clergyman and conservationist Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley (1851-1920).

158.

Cross, J. W., *George Eliot's Life, as related in her letters and journals, arranged and edited by her husband J. W. Cross* (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1885), 3 vols.

Vol. 1: xiv + 484pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 2: vi + 449pp. Portrait of the subject. Vol. 3: vi + 470pp. Reprinted in 1886.

George Eliot [Mary Ann, later Marian, Evans] (1819-80): novelist. Eliot worked as an assistant editor to the *Westminster Review* and had translated Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1854) before achieving fame as a novelist with *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Adam Bede* (1859). Though her later novels *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1862-3), *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* (1874-6) divided critical opinion, they confirmed her status as one of the age's leading novelists. Eliot's unmarried relationship with the writer George Henry Lewes (1817-78) caused some controversy, as did her short marriage to John Walter Cross (1840-1924), younger by twenty years, and her future biographer.

John Walter Cross (1840-1924): banker. Cross worked in a banking house and then in his firm of commission agents before entering a close relationship with the Leweses in the 1860s. George Eliot turned towards him following the death of G. H. Lewes, and accepted his marriage proposal in 1880, and they were married shortly before her death.

This was the second full-length biography of the famous novelist to be published (see Mathilde Blind, 1883, above, and Leslie Stephen, 1902, below). The biography was mocked upon its publication and became known then and now as the representative of heavily censured, eulogising Victorian memorial biography. Cross announces in his introduction his heavily selective method in the attempt to form an 'autobiography'. The biographer intervenes with short, connecting comments. Cross appears as a disproportionately large presence in the work. For all its faults, however, Cross did place a strong emphasis on Eliot as a writer, as opposed to a woman leading a domestic life, which was still somewhat rare at this time.

159.

O'Meara, Kathleen, *Madame Mohl: Her Salon and her Friends. A Study of Social Life in Paris* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1885).

vi + 315 pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1886.

Mary Elizabeth Mohl [*née* Clarke] (1793-1883): author and salon hostess. Mary was largely educated in the south of France and moved to Paris where a circle of intellectuals gathered around her. She married the German orientalist Julius Mohl (1800-76) in 1847. Madame Mohl's at-homes became famous, and visited by such luminaries as Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell and Turgenev. She also formed a close friendship with Florence Nightingale. Mohl's published works included a sketch and assessment of Turgenev (1859) and a biography of Madame Récamier (1862).

Kathleen O'Meara [*pseud.* Grace Ramsay] (1839-88): novelist and biographer. O'Meara moved to Paris from Dublin in early childhood. She wrote Catholic novels and stories such as *A Woman's Trials* (1867) and *The Battle of Connemara* (1878). Her biographical work includes lives of Thomas Grant (1874), Frederick Ozanam (1876) and Mother Mary Teresa Kelly (1878).

The work is a lively and gossipy volume, which moves straight to the main interest of the subject's life, beginning *in medias res* with Clarke's introduction to Chateaubriand and includes numerous portraits of Clarke's famous acquaintances. There is no real analysis of the subject. O'Meara frames Mohl's life within an analysis of the role and evolution of women's

literary salons. The biographer clearly appreciates the subject's unconventionality and strong character, and provides space for her voice.

160.

Smith, Thornley, *A Christian Mother: Memoirs of Mrs Thornley Smith. With Extracts from her letters, etc. By her husband* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1885).

xiii + 274pp. Photograph of subject.

Catherine Thornley [*née* Stephens] (1813-84): Lancashire Methodist and temperance worker. Catherine was removed from school from a young age to assist with running the house, but educated herself. She joined the Wesleyan society in 1832 and became a Sunday-school teacher, a collector for missionary societies and a visitor of the sick and the poor. She married her future biographer, Thornley Smith, in 1848 and the couple settled in Dartford. They travelled throughout England and eventually came to live in Haworth, where the Reverend Brontë was curate. The couple and their eight children found the area uncongenial, and later moved to Bolton.

Thornley Smith (fl. 1862-88): Wesleyan clergyman and religious writer. Smith published a number of minor religious works, including biographies of the reverend T. L. Hodgson (1854), J. W. Etheridge (1871), H. Pearse (1864), a sketch of the early life of Christ (1868).

Thornley considers the circulating contemporary idea that the biographies needed by the public were those of obscure lives, and he sees his wife as a representative of these. He distinguishes between little and trivial elements in a life. The biography is mostly composed of the subject's letters. The biography's particularity resides in the particular voice of the biographer, a rigid and narrow-minded preacher who becomes unintentionally amusing in his sermon-like opinions, bolstered by quotations from the poets (Longfellow is a particular favourite). The biography includes vehement condemnations of horse races, soldiers' immorality, dancing and pernicious literature. The biography makes much of the Brontë connection in order to give additional interest to the narrative.

161.

Westlake, J. G., *A Service of Suffering, or Leaves from the Biography of Mrs. Croad, Formerly of Brading and Swindon, now residing at Redland, Bristol* (London: W. Mack, 1885). Second edition.

viii + 110pp. Portrait of the subject.

Rebecca Caroline Hayman Croad (1840-?): invalid and clairvoyant. Croad, who was born into a relatively wealthy background, became a local celebrity for her medical condition: she lost the use of her legs and feet in 1864, was confined to her bed since 1866, lost her sight in 1870, suffered from locked jaw same year, lost her hearing in 1871, lost her speech in 1874, the use of her left hand and arm in 1879 and the rest of hand and arm in 1880. She nevertheless wrote poems and sketches, and developed clairvoyant abilities.

J. G. Westlake (n.d.). Westlake was acquainted with Mrs. Croad since July 1877, and she later lived for seven months in the biographer's house. This appears to have been Westlake's only published work.

The work is an example of the type of biographies of human curiosities that reaches back to a biographical tradition popular in the eighteenth century. The work begins with an aura of respectability by stating that the purpose of the work is to illustrate the resources of God. Westlake aims the biography at both students of sciences and Christians. The biographer sees the age as an age of sensationalism, and denies any possible suggestion that the biography is intended to feed into this trend. The subject was still alive at the time of

publication, and the biographer announces his willingness to respond to any reader queries. The work sold 3,000 copies in 4 months.

162.

F. L. M. B., "A Voice That Is Still": Memorials of Esther Beamish (London: John F. Shaw, 1886).

357 pp. Photograph of the subject.

Esther Matilda Grace Beamish (?-1882): missionary. Esther left England for missionary work in Belgium in 1874, and she later worked in France and Brighton. In 1880, she accompanied a friend to Egypt and pursued a full tour of the East, before returning to her work in Belgium in 1880. She continued missionary work in Algiers, having accompanied a friend there in 1881.

Frances L. M. Beamish (n.d.): Esther Beamish's sister. This appears to have been her only publication.

The biography is prefaced by E. Jane Whately, a fellow-missionary and biographical subject (1894 - see below). The work is not well written; dates (including the subject's birth date) and much essential information are omitted, and names are often evoked with dashes. The bulk of the work is taken up with the subject's letters, diary entries and writings, with only a few short sentences of connecting narrative. The subject's accomplishments tend to be underplayed, and the reader gains very little sense of her work. The work is somewhat representative of the less successful type of family memoir which was nevertheless published in large numbers.

163.

Jolly, William, *Flora MacDonald in Uist. A Study of the Heroine in Her Native Surroundings* (Perth: S. Cowan & Co., 1886).

vii + 93pp. Reprinted in 1932.

Flora MacDonald (1722-90): Jacobite heroine. MacDonald was born in South Uist, Outer Hebrides. She was connected with important Scottish clans. MacDonald helped Prince Charles Edward (1720-88) with his escape after his defeat at Culloden in 1746. The prince escaped but Flora was captured and questioned, and held in the Tower of London. She was released after the general amnesty in 1747. A highly romanticised 'autobiography' was produced by Flora's granddaughter in 1870.

William Jolly (fl. 1871-83): inspector of schools, scientist and writer. Little is known of Jolly's childhood, spent in Pollokshields. Jolly's principal employment was as Inspector of Schools for Inverness, and he published works on education, including a study of the phrenologist George Combe (1879). His interests included natural science. From 1871, he was a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He helped to run the Milport Marine Biological Station, acted as the first President of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club and became Vice-President of the Geological Society of Glasgow in 1885. He was a close friend of John Stuart Blackie (1809-95), who describes him as 'Hilarius' in *Altavona* (1882), and also a close friend of H. A. Page. He was also a keen enthusiast of literature, published works on Robert Burns and the literature of the Highlands, and became President of the Ruskin society in 1879.

The biography is an example of patriotic biography, but also of the sub-category of biography that traced the development of character in a particular environment. It is a celebration of 'local colouring'. Jolly develops in this sketch his interest in natural environment, which he developed at length in his 1883 biography of John Duncan (see

above). The work is also an example of 'quest biography' in which the biographer writes himself into the narrative. The work opens with the biographer and his good friend Professor Blackie looking into an old cottage, and how the pair travelled in search of the heroine, with descriptions of both landscapes and picturesque cottages.

164.

Baxter, Lucy, *The Life of William Barnes, Poet and Philologist* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1887).

xiv + 358pp. Photograph of the subject.

William Barnes (1801-86): poet, philologist and autodidact. Barnes was born into a humble farming family. He became a solicitor's clerk in 1814 and, later, a schoolmaster. He eventually set up his own school. He was ordained in 1847. Barnes worked hard to improve his family's fortunes and educated himself in a wide variety of subjects. He became reputed as the author of calm, nostalgic poetry and some admired poetry on his wife Julia Miles (1805-52), included in *Poetical Pieces* (1820). Later in his career he researched philology, and published works such as *A Philological Grammar* (1854). He was known in Dorset as kindly, albeit eccentric, man.

Lucy Baxter [*née* Barnes, *pseud.* Leader Scott] (1837-1902): art writer. Barnes's literary tastes helped to foster Lucy's own literary inclinations. She paid for a voyage to Italy by publishing articles and stories and married Samuel Thomas Baxter in 1867. She became an Honorary Member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence in 1882. Her works include *The Renaissance Art in Italy* (1883) and a biography and study of Correggio (1902).

The biography is a celebration of a poet and writer of local notoriety, and of small communities in general. The work praises the calm and the uneventful, and dwells, for example, on the subject's favourite walks. The account is lively, with some use of direct speech. The biographer clearly attempted to compose an artistic work. Each chapter is prefaced by a 'poetical illustration' that brings out a particular aspect of the subject's life. Baxter spends an equal amount of time considering Barnes's philological work and his poetry. Some of the work is marred by excessive quaintness.

165.

Gilchrist, Herbert Harlakenden (ed.), *Anne Gilchrist, her life and writings* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887).

xxi + 368pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1973.

Anne Gilchrist [*née* Burrows] (1828-85): writer. Anne married the art critic and biographer Alexander Gilchrist (1828-61) in 1851. The Gilchrists were neighbours and close friends of the Carlyles. Anne helped to complete her husband's seminal biography of Blake following Alexander's death in 1861, with the help of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Anne Gilchrist also published essays, a translation of Hugo's *La Légende des Siècles* and a biography of Mary Lamb (1883 - see above). Anne cultivated many illustrious friendships, notably with the Rossettis, and Tennyson, but she became mostly known for her close friendship with and championing of Walt Whitman. Gilchrist planned, but never wrote, a biography of Dorothy Wordsworth.

Herbert Harlakenden Gilchrist (1857-1914): painter. Herbert, Anne Gilchrist's son, attended drawing schools from the age of fourteen and became a study at the Royal Academy. He pursued his studies in America from 1876, before returning to America. His work includes portraits of his mother and Walt Whitman. Like his sister Beatrice, he committed suicide. This appears to have been his only publication.

The biographer is clearly more attracted to the opportunity his subject provides for portraits of eminent artists and writers of the period. The work begins vividly but is soon taken over by excerpts from letters sent and received, and the connecting narrative diminishes. There is almost no sense of Anne as a writer but more of her role within a social circle, which is not necessarily a misogynist bias, but emulates the more gossipy type of biography which was in vogue for both men and women. The biography includes a prefatory notice by William Michael Rossetti.

166.
O'Connell, Mrs. Morgan John, *Glimpses of a Hidden Life: Memories of Attie O'Brien* (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1887).

272 pp.

Attie O'Brien [*born* Frances Marcella O'Brien] (1840-1883) poet. An Irish Catholic, Attie, who kept her childhood name throughout her life, was the daughter of a landowner who was raised by her aunt when her father emigrated to California with his elder children. She later settled at Kildysart. She remained single throughout her life, and found her solace through literary endeavours and the verse and prose tales she published in Irish magazines such as the *Irish Monthly*. Her final serial, *The Monk's Prophecy*, was a successful work. She suffered from poor health, including asthma, throughout her life.

Mary Anne Bianconi O'Connell (fl. 1878-92): writer. O'Connell was an Irish landowner who was closely acquainted with O'Brien. Her other works include a biography of Charles Bianconi (1878), sketches of Irish luminaries and a work on landowning (1886).

The biography is a curious work in which the biographer's own voice, her satisfaction at her own marriage and her own literary opinions, are strangely dominant. Though she makes no huge claims for her subject's talent, O'Connell considers Attie's nervous unrest in the light of the artistic temperament. The work is most interesting in its perception of the frustrations of the unoccupied female life.

167.
Hobson, the Reverend W. F., *Catharine Leslie Hobson, Lady-Nurse, Crimean War, and Her Life* (London: Parker and Co., 1888).

172 pp.

Catharine Leslie Hobson (1823-87): nurse. Hobson was the daughter of a Master in the Royal Navy. As a child, she visited the poor and engaged in philanthropic work. She later trained as a nurse in a London hospital, and eventually went to the Crimea. She married the Reverend W. F. Hobson, her future biographer, in 1856.

William Fraser Hobson (fl. 1877-88): clergyman; religious and legal writer. Hobson's other works include examinations of church innovations (1876), the new lay court of final appeal in ecclesiastical causes (1884) and the public worship regulation act (1877).

This biography of a potentially interesting career is disappointing and of little literary worth. The subject's career is described in abstract religious terms, and general spiritual reflections take precedence over dates and concrete details. The work sometimes pauses for lengthy character assessment, including an odd, lengthy rhapsody on the wonder of the human hand.

168.
Bayly, Mrs [Mary], *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Sewell* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1889). Third edition.

xii + 336 pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1890 and 1892 (sixth edition).

Mary Sewell [*née* Wright] (1797-1884): writer and poet. Mary was the daughter of a Quaker farmer. Sewell's family suffered social decline following her father's ruin in 1817 and she became a governess. Mary married the Quaker Isaac Sewell (1793-1878) in 1819. Her literary career was prompted by financial need when her husband's affairs collapsed. She left the Quakers in her late thirties whilst remaining intensely religious, and she was engaged throughout her life in philanthropic work, including anti-slavery and temperance campaigns. Her works were mostly didactic and targeted young readers. Her daughter was Anna Sewell (1820-78), the author of *Black Beauty* (1877).

Mary Bayly (fl. 1853-89): didactic writer. Bayly's published works consisted principally of advice to young girls and parents, such as *An Old Mother's Letter to Young Women* (1855) and *Home Rule: An Old Mother's Letter to Parents* (1886). Bayly was a friend of Mary Sewell.

The biography suggests the intimacy of the subject with the biographer, as it adopts the Boswellian method of quoting long conversations – similarly, by chapter three the subject is in her sixties, when she met the biographer. The narrative does not progress straightforwardly but is regularly interrupted with anecdotes removed from their proper chronology. Though it is somewhat insufficiently analytical or critical, the biography does give a no-fuss depiction of the life of a writing woman.

169.

Pitman, Emma Raymond, Mrs, *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1889).

160pp.

Collective biography: Ann H. Judson; Mrs Johnson; Mrs Gobrat; Mrs Wilkinson and Mrs Cargill.

Emma Raymond Pitman (1841-?): biographer and missionary historian. Little is known of Pitman, who served for a time as a governess, an experience she describes in *My Governess Life* (1883). She became a prolific author of missionary biographies, and her works include *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880 – see above), accounts of Mary B. Baldwin (1881 – see above), Elizabeth Fry (1884 – see above), *Lady Hymn Writers* (1892) and *Missionaries Heroines in Eastern Lands* (1895 – see below).

As with Pitman's *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880 – see above), the work is introduced by a reflection on the value of missionary enterprises and the nature of missionary labour, with statistics. The calm consideration of missionary work is combined with a muted call for the expansion of female activities and a feminist content made more acceptable by an insistently Christian framework. The work is densely illustrated with exotic scenes, landscapes of foreign lands and natives.

170.

Banks, Adeline Mary, *Poet, preacher and evangelist: the Reverend Charles Waters Banks* (London: Robert Banks and Son, 1890).

vii + 184pp.

Charles Waters Banks (1806-86): poet and Baptist minister. Banks's works included biographies of John Calvin (1851) and Nebuchadnezzar (1857), together with reflections on religious controversies.

Mary Adeline Banks (n.d). Little is known of Mary Adeline Banks, the subject's daughter, who also published a biography of J. Thomas Kingsbury in 1911.

The work is another example of a very simple form of domestic biography, with no literary pretensions. The work is intensely religious and much of it is cluttered with abstract

reflections rather than a portrait of the subject. There is an emphasis on the value of local rather than national fame.

171.

Gosse, Edmund, *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, FRS* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1890).

viii + 387pp. Photograph of the subject.

Philip Henry Gosse (1810-88): zoologist and religious writer. Gosse was the son of a mezzotint engraver and painter of miniature portraits. He worked as a junior clerk whilst pursuing his early interest in natural history. After working as a clerk in Newfoundland he returned to England and joined the Methodist Society. Gosse returned to Canada, was unsuccessful in setting up an agricultural co-operative there, and moved to the United States where he worked as a teacher. He finally returned to England in 1839. His efforts to become a clergyman were again unsuccessful, but he found some success with the publication of *The Canadian Naturalist*, published in 1840. Gosse continued to travel and published more works, including *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica* (1851). He became involved with the Brethren, and married one of its members, Emily Bowes (1806-57), in 1848. They moved to Torquay, where he wrote the extremely successful and influential *A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devonshire Coast* (1853), and prompted a craze for amateur naturalism. He was elected FRS three years later. After his wife's death in 1857 his own works lost touch with the times, and his effort to reconcile natural history with biblical accounts in *Omphalos: an Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (1857) was widely ridiculed. Gosse later created an independent chapel where he worked as minister, and married Eliza Brightwen (1813-1900) in 1860.

Edmund Gosse (1849-1928): writer. Edmund was Philip and Emily Gosse's only child. Emily Gosse (1806-57) was a tract writer whose biography was written by Anna Shipton (1863 – see above). Gosse's unusual childhood was described in *Father and Son* (1907), his most famous work, and a second attempt to portray his father after this 1890, more traditional, biography. The later portrait established him as a precursor of the 'new biographers' of the 1920s, and Gosse himself published essays in which he criticised the condition of contemporary biographical writing. He also published biographies of Coventry Patmore (1905) and Swinburne (1917), and contributed to the scholarly English Men of Letters series with volumes on Thomas Gray (1882) and Jeremy Taylor (1903). Gosse enjoyed friendships with, amongst others, the Pre-Raphaelites, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Browning, Henry James and Thomas Hardy. He became librarian of the House of Lords in 1904, and was knighted in 1925.

This was Edmund Gosse's first attempt at depicting the life of his father, and has attracted far less attention than the later *Father and Son*. The work is overall a traditional work of domestic biography, constructed from the papers that Philip Gosse left his son with a view to his own biography, and with a typical final chapter that sums up his personal characteristics. The later, more original work, is nevertheless anticipated in some ways: Gosse asserts that his father detested contemporary over-pious and whitewashing biographies and 'goody-goody lives of good men'. The work is lively and begins in medias res. There are far less autobiographical elements than in the later memoir. Gosse expresses dissatisfaction with the portrait, and feels that his father could only be evoked through a different approach than the common method of domestic biography.

172.

Macpherson, John, *Isabella Macpherson: A Devoted Life* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1890).

192pp. Photomezzotype of the subject.

Isabella Macpherson [*married name* Simpson] (1842-69): home missionary. Macpherson was born in Cullen, Scotland, the daughter of a road-maker. She was influenced by the religious revival that took place between 1839 and 1859, and the conversion of her sister. In 1861 she left for Dundee to keep house for her brother, and she worked with him on Home Missions, visiting slums and offering religious teachings. In 1874 she married the Reverend A. J. Simpson, and continued to excel as a housemaker and Home Missionary until her death at the age of twenty-seven.

John Macpherson (1847-1902): religious writer. The biographer is the subject's brother, and the author of the *Life and Labours of Duncan Matheson, the Scottish Evangelist* (1871) and *Henry Moorhouse, the English Evangelist* (1881) together with religious histories and theological discussions.

The biography provides no real sense of its subject. Instead, Isabella is used as a guide to colourful stories of slum life, and the biographer's own religious doubts and triumphs. The biographer strives to portray housekeeping as a form of missionary activity of equal value to foreign travel, suggesting that women need not leave their domestic sphere.

173.

[Anonymous], *Pensions for the blind poor: Memoir of Mr Thomas Pocock, late Hon. Secretary of the Royal Blind Pension Society* (London: Office of the Society, 1891[?]).

14pp.

Thomas Pocock Snr (?-1891): philanthropist secretary of the Royal Blind Pension Society. Pocock Snr, a businessman, founded the Protestant Blind Society in 1863, and the name was changed to the Blind Pension Society in 1883. Queen Victoria became patron of the society in her Golden Jubilee year, and the name was again changed accordingly.

The biographer has not been identified.

The sketch, presented in pamphlet form, gives only the very barest facts of the subject's life and is more concerned with praising his character and the good which the Royal Blind Pension Society carry out. It provides an example of biography being put to the service of advertising, but is of little other literary interest.

174.

Smiles, Samuel, *Jasmin: Barber, Poet, Philanthropist* (London: John Murray, 1891).

xvi + 344pp. Portrait of the subject. Reprinted in 1897.

Jacques Jasmin [*originally* Jacques Boé] (1798-1864): poet. Jasmin was born in Agen, France, the son of a tailor. He began work as a hairdresser in 1804 and eventually set up his own business. Jasmin's first volume of poems, *Papillotos* (1825) combined French with Occitan and he continued thereafter to play a crucial role in reviving the Provençal dialect. He would often travel and recite his work as a troubadour, and often donated the money he received to charitable enterprises. The Académie Française awarded him a pension in 1852, and he became a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

Samuel Smiles (1812-1904): best-selling didactic writer. Smiles was the son of a Calvinist paper maker and merchant. He began a career as a surgeon and was drawn towards literary work by earning money through lectures and articles. His reflection on *Physical Education, or, The Nurture and Management of Children* (1838) attracted attention and he was drawn into literary circles, and in 1838 he became the editor of the radical newspaper

Leeds Times, though he would later repeal his radical inclinations. He developed a parallel association with railway enterprises, and his initial encounter with George Stephenson in 1840 was influential for him, not least because it led to the publication of Smiles's best-selling biography of Stephenson. Smiles consolidated his reputation as an industrial biographer with works such as *Lives of the Engineers* (1861-2 – see above) and *Industrial Biography* (1863). He is principally remembered, however, for *Self-Help* (1859 – see below), a work that was founded on the self-help literature of the 1830s and 1840s and sold over 250,000 copies by the time of Smiles's death. Smiles countered accusations that his works were concerned with pecuniary gain and social advancement with full-length biographies of the humble naturalists Thomas Edward (1876 – see above) and Robert Dick (1878 – see above).

The biography is a rare attempt by Samuel Smiles to write a full-length biography of a literary figure. The humble origins of the subject enable the biographer to fall back on his favourite themes of self-help and perseverance. Nevertheless, the preface marks a difference with Smiles's other works. It is not an account of Jasmin's virtues and values, but an account of the biographer's quest for his subject – his travels through France, and his attempts to obtain copies of the works, in a manner that resembles Alexander Gilchrist's biography of William Blake (1863 – see above). The biography otherwise strongly resembles Smiles's full-length biographies of humble naturalists, with its extended descriptions of contemporary towns and landscapes, its episodic structure and its use of direct speech. The writing of poetry becomes another self-help activity.

175.

Tynan, Katharine, *A Nun: Her Friends and Her Order; Being A Sketch of the Life of Mother Mary Xaviera Fallon, Sometime Superior-General of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin in Ireland and Its Dependencies* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1891).

viii + 218pp. Photograph of the subject.

Jane Fallon [*name in religion* Mother Mary Xaveria] (1832-88): Irish nun. Fallon was one of four sisters, who all entered the convent. The family travelled extensively, stopping in France until the 1848 uprisings led them to return to Ireland. The girls were placed at Rathfarnham, governed by Mother Mary Teresa Ball (1794-1861). Fallon experienced a call to religion in 1849. After her profession, she was rapidly promoted and worked as Mistress of Schools, Mistress of Novices and Mistress-General of Schools. She was elected Superior-General in 1880.

Katharine Tynan [*married name* Hinkson] (1859-1931): poet, novelist and biographer. Tynan was the daughter of an Irish gentleman farmer, nonconforming Catholic and supporter of Parnell. She showed signs of precocity, but by the age of seven she was almost entirely blind. Tynan became the first literary editor of the *Irish Daily Independent*, which supported Parnell, and began to write and publish poetry, including *Louise de la Vallière and Other Poems* (1885). She was the centre of an Irish literary salon and became friends, and collaborated, with W. B. Yeats (1865-1939), who she was the first to review, and who proposed to her, unsuccessfully, in 1891. She married Henry Albert Hinkson (c.1866-1919) in 1893. Her writing became increasingly used to support her family, and she published ninety-four novels and numerous works of poetry, memoirs and biographies.

This is a colourful and lively biography. Tynan makes full use of her poetic talents to convey the poetry of religious life and the intensity of female friendships, and even a kind of sensuality. The work is replete with anecdotes rather than detailed analysis and moves swiftly, pausing at intervals to give more detailed portraits. The biographer gives a good sense of the

subject's voice and sense of humour. The biographer combines the poetic emphasis with a strong stress on the importance of work. The idea of female toughness is explored.

176.

Hamilton, Catherine J[ane], *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways* (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden and Co., 1892).

280 pp.

Collective biography: Fanny Burney, Mrs Inchbald, Madame de Staël, Mrs Barbauld, Hannah More, Lady Anne Barnard, Joanna Baillie, Lady Nairn, Mrs Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth, Amelia Opie, Jane Austen, Lady Morgan, Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, Mary Russell Mitford and the Countess of Blessington.

Catherine Jane Hamilton (1841-?): author. Hamilton published a wide variety of works, including novels such as *Dr Belton's Daughter* (1890), collective biographies such as *Notable Irishwomen* (1904) and *Famous Love Matches* (1908) and children's tales.

The biographer acknowledges that not all of her examples are 'celebrated writers'. The sketches, which were previously published in a magazine, are self-admittedly 'light' and anecdotal, and they indulge in gossip. Female virtues of propriety and modesty are clearly valued, though the biographer is not too condemnatory regarding less 'virtuous' subjects, such as the Countess of Blessington. The work opens with an introduction claiming that writers tend to be unhappy women or women who could not find happiness in their domestic life.

177.

Hammerton, John Alexander, *Trial and triumph: a life and its lessons, being a biographical sketch of Robert Dransfield* (Glasgow: Scottish Permissive Bill & Temperance Association, 1892).

109 pp. Photograph of the subject.

Robert Dransfield (1821-?): temperance lecturer. Dransfield was born at Dalton, Yorkshire, the son was huntsman in the employ of a squire in whose service his mother also worked. He enlisted at the age of seventeen in the 99th Regiment of Foot, and was then quartered in the Royal Barracks, Dublin. He gradually succumbed to alcoholism, which threatened him with ruin. Married with a child, he moved his family to Leeds and began to work in a mill, where he stayed for seven years. In his youth and early manhood he associated with the Chartist movement. After lapsing once more into drunkenness, he pledged abstinence and began to lecture on the virtues of temperance. He was popular as a lecturer and even travelled to America to speak.

Sir John Alexander Hammerton (1871-1949): editor of reference books. Hammerton was born the son of a Scottish clog maker. He worked as an apprentice to a sculptor and tomb-cutter whilst seeking to educate himself through evening classes. He entered the literary world through the newspaper *The Reformer*, and his light-hearted articles and sketches began to appear in *Punch*. He was recruited by the founder of modern popular journalism, Alfred Harmsworth (1865-1922), and began to publish extremely successful works of reference including popular encyclopaedias and the *World's Greatest Books* series. He is also credited with having begun the 'V for Victory' sign. He was knighted in 1932.

The work is one of the better examples of temperance biography. The biography is recounted in a good-humoured tone, and Hammerton clearly revels in the anecdotes he recounts, his voice often merging with the subject's. Though this is a didactic biography, the lessons are implied rather than directly stated, and Hammerton clearly desired to distance the work from the less jocular type of temperance biography, and draws on literary references

from Shakespeare to Dickens to enliven the work. The biographer is weary of his subject's youthful Chartist affiliations and describes working-class revolt as the product of youthful exuberance. The subject was still alive when the work was published, and the biography ends with Dransfield's wedding anniversary in 1891. The biography is heavily illustrated.

178.

Kennedy, James, *Memoir of Margaret Stephen Kennedy* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1892).

xi + 276pp. Photograph of subject.

Margaret Stephen Kennedy [*née* Walker] (1814-91): Scottish missionary. Kennedy was born in Aberdeen. She joined her sister and brother-in-law in India in 1838, and married James Kennedy in 1840. Margaret worked on teaching local girls and on Zenana missions.

James Kennedy (1815-99): missionary. Kennedy was the subject's husband and the author of *Life and Work in Benares and Kuamon, 1839-1877* (1884), his only other published work beyond articles submitted to missionary journals and reports.

The biography is presented as a complementary volume to Kennedy's earlier work, giving more prominence to his wife's domestic character. Though the work is lively and readable, there is no real sense of Margaret's voice or presence (few of her letters are used, and she is rarely quoted). Instead, the narrative is based upon the biographer's own life, and the pronoun 'we' dominates. Stephen Kennedy's voice is quaint and his style anecdotal. One of the interests of the work resides in the detailed account of the history of missions and Church organisations.

179.

[Harrison, Mrs. John W.] A. Mackay Ruthquist, or, *Singing the Gospel among Hindus and Góns* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893).

viii + 380 pp. Photograph of the subject.

Alexina Mackay Ruthquist [*née* McKay] (1848-1892): missionary. Ruthquist was born in Banffshire, the child of a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. Her cousin was the missionary to Uganda Alexander McKay. In 1877, Alexina left for Nagpur as a zenana missionary, and she taught English, reading, needlework and religious instruction. She contributed to the magazine for the Free Church of Scotland under the pseudonym 'Phoebe'. In 1888 she married the Rev. Johan Ruthquist, a Swedish missionary, and she continued her missionary activities in Amarwara. Whilst accompanying a widowed Swedish missionary to Stockholm she became ill and died at Elektra.

Mrs John W. Harrison (fl. 1890-3): biographer. Harrison also published a biography of Ruthquist's husband, *A. M. Mackay, Pioneer Missionary to the C. M. S. to Uganda* (1890). Harrison was the sister of Alexander Murdoch Mackay. Though her two biographies were well received, these seem to have been her only published works.

The biography is an uneven work, opening much in the same way as Jolly's *The Life of John Duncan*, with an emphasis on the picturesque and fictional techniques. The initially strong narrative voice disappears as the subject's voice appears, and the biographer gradually disappears entirely. The narrative is frequently interrupted with quotations from songs and psalms, and the language is often flowery.

180.

Lucas, Edward Verrall, *Bernard Barton and his friends: a record of quiet lives* (London: Edward Hicks Jr., 1893).

193pp.

Bernard Barton (1784-1849): poet. Barton was born into a Quaker family and remained faithful to that allegiance. He was apprenticed to a shopkeeper from the age of fourteen, whose daughter he eventually married. Barton's various employments included working as a merchant, a tutor and finally a bank clerk in Woolbridge, where he settled. Barton published volumes of verse such as *Metrical Effusions* (1812), and found favour with readers of gentle, domestic poetry. His greatest talent was perhaps for friendships, and he maintained an intimate and lengthy correspondence with Charles Lamb (1775-1834).

Edward Verrall Lucas (1868-1938): essayist and biographer. Like his subject, Lucas' parents were Quakers. He was apprenticed to a bookseller from the age of sixteen and provided himself with a literary education. Commissions to publish works on Charles Lamb and a biography of Bernard Barton led to further work on the Lambs, for which he gained a reputation. Though also published poetry, translations, travel writing and comedies, it is as a Charles Lamb scholar that he remains principally known. He became chairman of Methuens publishing company in 1924.

The biographer immediately stresses that the work is written in contrast to lives of Romantic poets that stress stirring events and eccentric or sensational characters. The biography is a celebration of a poet of principally local fame, and of quiet friendships and modest ambitions. The word 'charm' is recurrent. Lucas makes no large claims for the importance of his subject's poetry, but is interested in the wholesome nature of the life itself. The reader is addressed as a friend and invited into the subject's home. The biography is readable though at times cloying in its emphasis on the quaint. It is interesting in its rejection of the idea of the tormented artist.

181.

Smith, G[eorge] Barnett, *Women of Renown: Nineteenth Century Studies* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1893).

x + 478pp.

Collective biography: Frederika Bremer; Marguerite Countess of Blessington; George Eliot; Jenny Lind; Mary Somerville; George Sand; Mary Carpenter; Sydney Lady Morgan; Rachel and Lady Hester Stanhope.

George Barnett Smith (1841-1909): author and journalist. From the age of twenty-four, Smith worked on the staff of the *Globe* newspaper, and from 1868 on the *Echo*. He achieved a reputation as a sound poetry critic, and his friend Robert Browning sent him proof copies of his work. Smith was interested in chronicling the age, and wrote biographies of Gladstone (1879), Queen Victoria (1886) together with accounts of contemporary heroes and luminaries.

The work is part of late-century efforts to assess the century's productions and define a female canon. Barnett intends these women to act as 'representatives', and seeks to cover literary, scientific, musical, dramatic, philanthropic and adventurous activities. The extensive prior literature available on Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are the biographer's justification for excluding them from the work. The work is interesting in striving to achieve a better balance between biographical elements and an insightful criticism of the women's works that was the case in most previous collective biographies of women.

182.

Anderson, Jessie Annie, *Lewis Morrison-Grant: His Life, His letters and Last Poems* (London: Alexander Gardner, 1894).

294pp. Photograph of the subject.

Lewis Morrison-Grant (1872-1893): poet. Morrison-Grant was born at Loch Park in Scotland into a humble family. He displayed an early appetite for literature and had already sketched out an autobiography in early childhood. He was plagued from the age of nine by poor health. He attended Aberdeen University for two years where he forged some literary connections. Some of his verses appeared in James Kinlay's anthology of *Modern Scottish Poets*. He died at the age of twenty-one, having published only one book of verse, *Protomantis and Other Poems*, in 1892.

Jessie Anne Anderson (b. 1861): Scottish poet. Anderson published a number of poetry volumes, including *An Old-World Sorrow* (1903), *Breaths from the Four Winds* (1911) and *A Singer's Year* (1928), together with some light and satirical verse.

The work is an interesting biography of an unknown poet who died young. The biography is in many ways an account of the difficulties for a writer to penetrate the public sphere and enter the world of publishing. It echoes *The Life of John Sterling* (1851 – see above) in its representation of the subject's quest for a vocation, and in the poet's wavering between literature and religion. Carlyle was an influence in the subject's life, and the biographer reflects her subject's own interest in obscurity and fame. The work also draws on the life of John Keats, with whom the subject is often compared.

183.

Baron, Joseph, *James Sharples, blacksmith and artist. With Portrait and Reproductions* (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1894).

59pp. Photograph of the subject.

James Sharples (1825-93): blacksmith and artist. Sharples was born into a large Yorkshire family of blacksmiths, a trade that he entered before reaching the age of ten. He pursued an interest in art through classes at a local Mechanics' Institute and through solitary study. His most famous work is the large painting *The Forge* (1849), which attracted attention as much for its quality as for the painter's personal situation. He was a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, who gave him a prize in 1851 for *The Smithy*.

Joseph Baron (1859-1924): writer of local affairs. Baron began his career as a solicitor's clerk but left this post to work on the *Lancashire Daily Express*. Though he also wrote poetry and plays, most of Baron's published works were devoted to local language and culture, and include a dictionary of Lancashire dialect (1907), a guide to the English lakes (1925) and a guide to Blackburn history (1906), from where he originated. He achieved some local fame for his work on dialect.

Sharples had been briefly evoked in Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859 – see above), and the biographer was prompted to write a longer tribute to the humble blacksmith. The biography is dedicated to the working men of the United Kingdom. The work is overall poorly written, and the biographer shows little interest in producing a readable narrative. The principal function of the work is a didactic one. Reproductions of Sharples's works are given, with critical appraisals. The work develops the idea of biography as advertisement: the biography is partly an extended advertisement for a Blackburn art dealer who announces special frames and prices for reproductions of *The Forge*.

184.

Bishop, Maria Catherine, *A Memoir of Mrs. Augustus Craven (Pauline de la Ferronnays)*, author of 'Le récit d'une soeur', with extracts from her diaries and correspondence (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 383pp. Vol. 2: 403pp. Reprinted in 1896.

Pauline Marie Armande Aglae Craven [*née de la Ferronnays*] (1808-91): author. Craven was born in London of aristocratic French parents who had left France during the French Revolution. In 1834 she married Augustus Craven, an attaché to the British embassy. Her marriage was a success, and her successful work *Le Récit d'une soeur* (1866) was in part a celebration of her domestic life. Travels to Rome confirmed her attraction to Catholicism. Financial difficulties led her to publish for pecuniary gain, and she produced works such as the novel *Anne Severin* (1868) and a popular biography of Lady Georgiana Fullerton (1888). She maintained close ties with England throughout her life.

Maria Catherine Bishop (fl. 1894-7): novelist and biographer. Bishop published a novel, *Elizabeth Eden*, in 1878, and biographies of Mrs. Augustus Craven (1894 – see above) and an account of Marie Antoinette's life in prison (1893).

The biography is interested the English perspective on a subject who moved between France and England. Bishop insists that the life proves that it is possible (especially for a woman) to live in the world and 'yet not be of it'. The work makes plentiful use of the social connections from which the subject benefited, which enables the subject to depict aristocratic London society in detail.

185.

Forrest, Katherine, *Manx Recollections: Memorials of Eleanor Elliott* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1894).

xii + 243 pp.

Eleanor Elliott [*née Weatherell*] (1813-1882): scholar and philanthropist. Elliott was a woman of some local importance in the Isle of Man. She taught herself some knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian and Spanish. She married the surgeon Philip Elliott in 1835 and, though devoted to her children, somewhat neglected her domestic duties in favour of intellectual pursuits and local philanthropic work. She achieved some notoriety through her early admiration and published assessment of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Katherine A. Forrest (fl. 1830-94). Forrest was a local acquaintance of Eleanor Elliot. This seems to have been her only publication.

The work opens with the gushing tone of someone proud at having received the attentions of a local celebrity. The biographer recalls her schoolgirl association with the subject. The biography is overall very simple. Its interest and particularity lies in its detailed representation of everyday life in a close nineteenth-century community, which, far from London, responded to great historical and literary events, from the Crimean War to the ascension of the Brownings. There is a keen attention to detail and the description of contemporary manners and mores.

186.

Mayer, Gertrude Townshend, *Women of Letters* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1894), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 354pp. Vol. 2: 344pp.

Collective biography: Margaret Duchess of Newcastle, Mary Countess Cowper, Lady Hervey, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mrs Delany, Mrs Montagu, Lady Anne Barnard, Mary

and Agnes Berry, Elizabeth Inchbald, Amelia Opie, Syney Owenson Lady Morgan, Miss Mitfor, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Lady Duff Gordon.

Gertrude Townshend Mayer [*née* Dalby] (1839-1932): novelist and essayist. Little is known of Mayer's childhood. In 1868 she married Samuel Ralph Townshend Mayer (1841-80), who founded the Free and Open Church Association. Her works include the novel *Sir Hubert's Marriage* (1876) and the collection of stories *The Fatal Inheritance* (1878). She later became the editor of *Temple Bar*, to which she had frequently contributed, and applied for assistance from the Royal Literary Fund after her husband's death.

The sketches are reprinted from *Temple Bar*. Mayer insists upon their unpretending nature in the preface, and stresses that they are mostly formed of autobiographical material and contemporaries' recollections. The collective biography belongs to those contemporary works aiming to give a brief overview of key figures for hurried readers.

187.

Rea, Mrs. George T., *A Broken Journey: Memoir of Mrs. Beatty, Wife of Rev. William Beatty, Indian Missionary, Lost in the S. S. "Roumania", October 1892* (London: James Nesbit & Co., 1894).

xiv + 184pp. Photograph of the subject.

Mrs. Fanny Beatty [*née* Wallace] (1841-92): missionary. Mrs. Beatty was born in Ireland. She taught at a seminary in Belfast until her marriage in 1865, after which the pair sailed for India. Mrs. Beatty learnt the Gujarati language and taught classes in Gogo, eventually taking over a girl's school. Her missionary career was interrupted by trips to England for the sake of her children and her own health. She set out once more for India in 1892 and was drowned when the 'Roumania' was shipwrecked.

Sara Rea (fl. 1894). The biographer is not a professional biographer, and affects a modest, self-effacing tone. This appears to have been her only publication.

The biography is made of short chapters narrating the subject's life in simple language. More than most works of this group, the biographer provides practical details on missionary life (the cost of travelling, life on board ship), in such a way as suggests that the biographer shared similar experiences. There is also an unusually large (and interesting) emphasis on the emotional difficulties of missionary work, notably the subject's separation from her children. The biographer quotes from Samuel Smiles's *Character* (1871 – see above) to explain the function of the work, which is simple but readable.

188.

Wale, H., *Elizabeth Jane Whately: Reminiscences of her life and work* (London: Seeley and Co., 1894).

146pp.

Elizabeth Jane Whately (1822-93): missionary and religious author. Whately was the daughter of the archbishop of Dublin Richard Whately (1787-1863). She was given an unusually extensive education. She became involved in local philanthropic endeavours, and taught with her sisters for the Irish Church Mission Society. She authored a number of works, including a biography of Martin Luther (1862) and a biography of her father (1866). Many of her works, such as *Romanism in the Light of the Gospel* (1882) warn readers against the dangers of Roman Catholicism. She joined her sister Mary Louisa Whately (1824-89) in missionary work until 1889 in Egypt, where they established a school for girls. She died in Guernsey in 1893.

Henrietta Whately Wale [*née* Whately] (d. 1908): author. Relatively little is known of Henrietta, another daughter of Richard Whately, the archbishop of Dublin. Her youthful

courtship with Thomas Arnold the younger (1823-1900) was unsuccessful, and Arnold emigrated to New Zealand following his disappointment. (Henrietta's brother Edward William Whately (1823-92) was Thomas Arnold's close friend.) Instead, Henrietta married the lawyer Charles Brent Wale (1817-64) the following year, in 1848. Wale wrote under the pseudonym W.H. Her works principally involved simple tales for children, such as *Life in a Swiss Chalet* (1878) and poems such as *Village Lyrics* (1877), composed with Charlotte Arnold. Her literary career was far less extensive than that of her sister.

The biography assumes a matter-of-fact tone, simply listing Elizabeth's accomplishments and the events in a simple style, with few embellishments, approximating the tone of a *DNB* entry. Few letters from the subject remained, and as a consequence the biography places less emphasis on contemplation and description and more on action. There is no attempt at introspection or character analysis.

189.

Giberne, Agnes, *A Lady of England: The Life and Letters of Charlotte Maria Tucker* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895).

518pp. Photograph of the subject. Reprinted in 1896.

Charlotte Maria Tucker (1821-93): children's writer and missionary. Tucker was a successful writer of fiction for Victorian children written under the pseudonym 'ALOE', signifying 'A Lady of England'. She began writing didactic fiction after her father's death in 1851. At the age of fifty-four, freed of family ties, she left England for India to work as a missionary, and spent the remaining eighteen years of her life visiting Zenanas.

Agnes Giberne (1845-1939): author. Giberne was born in India, the daughter of an army officer. The family travelled extensively before settling in England. Giberne wrote both tales and fiction aimed at adolescent girls with an evangelical content such as *The Curate's Home* (1869). She developed a further reputation as a writer of scientific works aimed at children, such as *Sun, Moon and Stars* (1879).

In choosing 'ALOE' as a biographical subject, Giberne provides, along with Elizabeth Gaskell, another example of a woman writer narrating the life of a fellow writer. The biography makes a real effort to present the subject's faults as well as her qualities. The biographer stresses the division in the subject's life between her domestic and her active life. There is a tension within the work between the glorious conception of missionary work and its lack of ostensible results, leading to a reflection upon failure and success. The subject's own letters are lively. The biography stresses that the subject achieved fame as a writer but remained in obscurity as a missionary, and that it is this obscure life that she is concerned with. This is the most readable and well-crafted biography of a female missionary published during the period.

190.

Pitman, Emma Raymond, Mrs., *Missionary Heroines in Eastern Lands: Woman's Work in Mission Fields* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1895).

160pp. Reprinted in 1932.

Collective biography: Mrs Alexina Mackay Ruthquist; Mrs Bowen Thompson; Dr. Mary McGeorge and Miss Mary Louisa Whately.

Emma Raymond Pitman (1841-?): biographer and missionary historian. Little is known of Pitman, who served for a time as a governess, an experience she describes in *My Governess Life* (1883). She became a prolific author of missionary biographies, and her works include *Heroines of the Mission Field* (1880 – see above), accounts of Mary B. Baldwin

(1881 – see above), Elizabeth Fry (1884 – see above), *Lady Hymn Writers* (1892), *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands* (1889 – see above), and Ann H. Judson (1932).

As with most of Pitman's compilations, the work is densely illustrated, with sketches and photographs. Pitman places a strong emphasis upon the importance of female contributions to missionary work, and is equally attracted to the exoticism of such work, and is torn between the urge to celebrate 'stay-at-home Christians' and foreign work. Nevertheless, the work diverges from Pitman's earlier collective biographies of missionaries by placing a strong emphasis on the practical nature of missionary works and its daily tasks rather than its more sensational elements.

191.

Trollope, Frances Eleanor, *Frances Trollope: Her Life and Literary Work from George III to Victoria* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1895), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 325pp. Vol. 2: 321pp. Portrait of the subject.

Frances Trollope [*née* Milton] (1779-1863): novelist and travel writer. The daughter of a clergyman, Frances married the barrister Thomas Anthony Trollope (1774-1835) in 1809. An attempt to establish a business in North America in 1827 proved unsuccessful and the family returned to England. Trollope published thirty-five novels, primarily for financial gain. Her life was marked by financial and domestic troubles – she lost five of her seven children. Her important works include satirical novels such as *The Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837) and social problem novels such as *The Factory Boy* (1840). She specialised in portraying strong female characters and was not afraid to tackle controversial topics, for which she attracted some criticism. She was also the mother of the famous novelist Anthony Trollope (1815-82).

Frances Eleanor Trollope [*née* Ternan] (1834?-1913): novelist. Trollope was the sister of Dickens's mistress Ellen Ternan. Frances Eleanor Trollope was Frances Trollope's daughter-in-law, having married Thomas Adolphus Trollope (1810-92) in 1866 after serving as the governess of his children. She wrote numerous novels that share a tendency to depict suffering female characters, such as *Aunt Margaret's Troubles* (1866) and *Mabel's Progress* (1867). After T. A. Trollope's death she experienced financial difficulties and was awarded a Civil List pension in 1893.

The work is one of the most striking biographies of a woman writer published during the period. Like Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë (1857 – see above), it is the biography of one novelist written by another. The biographer has an eye for lively anecdotes and telling details, and the work moves along at a good pace. The work begins *in medias res* from the period of Trollope's marriage, with no commentary on her childhood. The work favours less an emphasis on the 'key' events of Trollope's life – her marriage, the birth of her children, the publication of her novels – than a depiction of day-to-day cares, visits to friends and family, and a sense of daily life. There is marked emphasis on financial worries, and the biographer is unabashed in depicting Trollope's vigorous attempts to act as breadwinner for her family. Literature is portrayed here more as work than as art.

192.

Wilberforce, Father Bertrand, *A Memoir of Mother Francis Raphael, O. S. D (Augusta Theodosia Drane), sometime Prioress Provincial of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of S. Catherine of Siena, Stone* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895).

clxix + 340pp. Portrait of subject. Reprinted in 1897, 1900, 1904 and 1923.

Augusta Theodosia Drane [*name in religion* Francis Raphael] (1823-94): prioress and author. Drane was the daughter of an East India tradesman, and Drane learnt much from his large travel library. She was a member of the established Church until encountering

Tractarian belief, and she converted to Roman Catholicism in 1850, and she professed her vows at the congregation of Stone in Staffordshire three years later. A woman of extraordinary energy, she produced, amongst other works, works of fiction, biographies of St. Dominic (1857), Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan (1869 – see above), a study of *Christian Schools and Scholars* (1867) and of the Dominican Order (1896). She combined literary activities with the management of 150 sisters in four different convents and engaged with contemporary artistic and intellectual debates.

Bertrand Wilberforce (1839-1904): prior and author. Wilberforce was a grandson of the famous abolitionist. He converted to Catholicism and was ordained a Dominican in 1864. Wilberforce acted as prior of St. Dominic's, London, 1872-5, and chaplain to the nuns at Stone, led by Augustua Theodosia Drane. His other works include a biography of St. Luis Beltrán (1882), translations of the works of Louis de Blois (1900) and a work on missionary activities in Japan (1870).

The biographer uses the method, common at the time, of letting the subject 'speak for herself', whilst stressing that there is nothing the subject would have disliked more than an autobiography. The preface provides an interesting reflection on the difficulty of reconciling the two. Wilberforce presents himself, inaccurately, as an 'editor'. The biography is very well written, with a flair for lively anecdotes. The work benefits largely from the strength of the subject's voice.

193.

Dutt, William A., *George Borrow in East Anglia* (London: David Nutt, 1896).

80pp.

George Henry Borrow (1803-81): traveller and writer. Borrow was born in Norfolk, the son of an army Captain, and lived a rootless existence during the Napoleonic wars. Borrow was uncertain of his vocation and began to produce translations from a wide range of European languages. He alternated between sojourns in London where he produced hack-work and periods in Norwich, interspersed with bouts of depression. He eventually found a point of stability with the British and Foreign Bible Society, who sent him throughout Europe to circulate biblical works. Published accounts of his travels were successful. Later works, combinations of fiction, autobiographical reminiscence, travel writing, satire and social commentary, *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857) perplexed readers and critics, and his later works met with little favour.

William Alfred Dutt (1870-1939): local travel writer. Dutt's works focused on Norfolk and Suffolk, and include an account of the *Highways and Byways of East Anglia* (1901) and guidebooks to the surroundings. Other than a work exploring the literary associations of East Anglia (1907), this appears to have been his only biographical work.

Despite the work's title, the biography does in fact give an account of the entirety of the subject's life, though a strong emphasis is placed on his attachment to Anglia. The biographer is keen to make the work a biography of local interest. There is a nostalgic element to the work, which describes England as it was before being changed by the railways. See William Ireland Knapp's 1899 biography of George Borrow, below, which is a more accomplished work.

194.

Mundell, Frank, *Heroines of Daily Life* (London: the Sunday School Union, 1896).

159pp.

Collective biography: most of the subjects are unnamed.

Frank Mundell (fl. 1896-1908): writer of children's books. Mundell published numerous books for the Sunday School Union. His collective biographies included *Heroines of Mercy* (1896), *Heroines of History* (1897) and *Heroines of the Faith* (1898). He also published children's biographies of Christopher Columbus (1892) and Captain Cook (1908).

This is a work of heavily illustrated collective biography aimed at children. It presents deeds of heroism carried out by everyday women and girls, such as a woman who rescued her children from a fire, or a mother who her child who had wandered onto train tracks. The biographer encourages a revision of contemporary definitions of heroism. The sketches themselves are simplistic and exaggerated.

195.

Bishop, Maria Catherine, *Memoir of Mrs. Urquhart* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1897).

404pp.

Harriet Angelina Urquhart [*née* Fortescue] (1825-89): international affairs writer. John Ruskin gave her the financial help to begin a shirt factory for the unemployed. In 1854, Urquhart married the diplomat David Urquhart (1805-77), an eccentric man and Russophile who conducted a lengthy examination of the health benefits of Turkish baths, of which he built several in London. Urquhart contributed articles to her husband's journal, the *Diplomatic Review*.

Maria Catherine Bishop (fl. 1894-7): novelist and biographer. Bishop published a novel, *Elizabeth Eden*, in 1878, and biographies of Mrs. Augustus Craven (1894 – see above) and an account of Marie Antoinette's life in prison (1893).

In the preface, the biographer notes on the contemporary proliferation of biographies and regrets their anecdotal style; for her, they are works aimed at entertainment. The biographer strives to return to a more narrowly didactic form of biographical writing. Nevertheless, the work, though largely unremarkable, is lively and well written, and is one of the better conversion biographies.

196.

Pratt, Edwin A., *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign: Being Short Histories of Great Movements* (London: George Newnes, 1897).

288pp.

Collective biography: Harriet Martineau, Miss Jessie Boucherett, Miss Maria S. Rye, Mrs Caroline Chisholm, Mrs E. L. Blanchard, Miss Frances Mary Buss, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Dr Garrett Anderson, Dr Sophia Jex-Blake, Miss Florence Nightingale, Mrs Wardrope, Mrs W. Rathbone, Miss Florence Lees, Miss Bertha M. Broadwood, The Countess of Winchilsea, Sister Katherine, Miss Louisa Twining, Agnes Elizabeth Jones, Mary Carpenter, Lady Kinnaird, Mrs Nassau Senior, Mrs Townsend, Elizabeth Gilbert, Mrs Daniell, Miss Weston and Miss Sarah Robinson.

Edwin A. Pratt (fl. 1897-1921): writer and biographer. Pratt published extensive works on governmental matters, including works on communication and transport (1912), American railways (1903), trade unionism (1904), canals (1906), agricultural organisation (1913) and the licensed trade (1907). His biographical works included a portrait of Louisa H. Hubbard (1898) and a biography of Catherine Gladstone (1898 – see below).

The work attempts to assess some of the major feminine contributions to the period. Pratt considers how 'the status of women' and 'the social evolution of the age' are connected. His subjects and reflections range from female employment, emigration, higher education, women doctors, nursing, poor law reform, trained workhouse nursing, organized

philanthropy, associations for girls and young women, blind workers, pioneer workers for soldiers and sailors. The work offers a tentative description of the burgeoning 'woman movement'. The work is principally interesting for combining historical and social reflections, such as the consequences of female clothes and fabrication methods on female emancipation, with sketches of individuals.

197.

Doyle, John A., *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782-1854. Based on her private correspondence...collected by her grand-nephew John Ferrier* (London: John Murray, 1898).

x + 349 pp.

Susan Edmonstone Ferrier (1782-1854): novelist. Ferrier was the daughter of James Ferrier, a legal practitioner, and through him she became acquainted with Sir Walter Scott with whom she developed a close friendship. Her novel, *Marriage* (1818), partly written by Charlotte Clavering, was a success and depicted aristocratic Highland families with verve. Her later novels *The Inheritance* (1824) and *Destiny* (1831) were also favourably received.

John Andrew Doyle (1844-1907): historian and writer. Doyle was the son of the *Morning Chronicle* editor Andrew Doyle. After completing his education at Eton and Oxford, he specialised in histories of American colonisation, with works such as *The American Colonies previous to the Declaration of Independence* (1869) and *The English in America* (1882).

The introduction illustrates contemporary debates surrounding the legitimacy and desirability of biography, and in particular literary biography; the tone is somewhat defensive. The biography immediately stresses the quiet and uneventful nature of the subject's life, and is uncertain as to the literary claims of its subject. Doyle presents himself as the 'editor' of the work.

198.

Everard, the Reverend George, *The Starry Crown: A Sketch of the Life Work of Harriet E. H. Urmston* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898).

254 pp. Portrait of subject.

Harriet Elizabeth Hughes [*née* Hughes] (1828-1897): missionary. Hughes was born in Surrey, the daughter of the MP for Oxford. She married the East India Company cadet Henry Brabazon Urmston in 1850, and joined him in India. She welcomed Anglican missionaries into her home, and extended her missionary work when relocating to Rawalpindi. Her concern was with British soldiers and their wives and, later, with Zenana and Medical Missions. Unusually for a woman, she frequently preached to large assemblies.

The Reverend George Everard (1828-1901): evangelical clergyman and writer. Everard was born into a large family, the son of a linen factory owner. He was an orphan by the age of fourteen and became a bank clerk. He underwent a conversion in 1846 and was ordained in 1852, beginning as a curate in Ramsgate. Everard later moved to several other curacies. He was a popular preacher and some of his books and tracts obtained a circulation of over 40,000. Everard wrote several books of religious advice, such as *Strong and Free: A Book for Young Men* and *Bright and Fair: A Book for Young Ladies*. He was a friend of the subject.

The biography is narrated in extremely simple language, as if addressed to children. Each chapter concludes with a moralising comment, and the bulk of the work reads like an extended sermon. The biographer moves rapidly over events and does not dwell in any depth

upon Harriet's missionary activities. He demonstrates some degree of unease towards Harriet's forthrightness and preaching activities.

199.

Pratt, Edwin A., *Catherine Gladstone: Life, Good Works, and Political Efforts* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1898).

xi + 272pp. Portrait of the subject.

Catherine Gladstone [*née* Glynne] (1812-1900): philanthropist; wife of William Ewart Gladstone. Gladstone was born into a well-connected family, travelled extensively in her youth and found many suitors amongst the aristocracy. Catherine married Gladstone, then an MP, in 1839. An energetic woman, she gave birth to eight children, maintained the reputation of the household, and took care of her extended family. Catherine Gladstone was her husband's confidant, supported him in numerous ways, and developed a political expertise of her own. Her philanthropic activities included supporting the House of Charity in Soho, a refuge for vagrants in Seven Dials, coming to the aid of prostitutes, maintaining a school, and setting up an orphanage and convalescent homes during the 1866 cholera epidemic.

Edwin A. Pratt (fl. 1897-1921): writer and biographer. Pratt published extensive works on governmental matters, including works on communication and transport (1912), American railways (1903), trade unionism (1904), canals (1906), agricultural organisation (1913) and the licensed trade (1907). His biographical works included a portrait of Louisa H. Hubbard (1898) and a work of collective biography on *Pioneer Women in Victoria's Reign* (1897 – see above).

The work is an early full-length example of what has become the popular biographical sub-genre of wives of famous men. Pratt argues that Mrs. Gladstone deserves a work in her own right and that her activities went beyond the short references made to her in her husband's biographies. For Pratt, her influence as a wife but also as a philanthropist made its mark on history. The preface is an interesting critique of the neglect of female biography. The ensuing narrative is conventional, well written and readable.

200.

[Anonymous], *The Inner Life of Lady Georgiana Fullerton, with notes of retreat and diary* (London: Burns & Oates, 1899).

400 pp.

Lady Georgiana Charlotte Fullerton [*née* Leeveson-Gower] (1812-85): novelist and biographer. Fullerton was the daughter of an ambassador and travelled extensively as a child. She married the embassy attaché Alexander George Fullerton (1808-97) in 1833. She converted to Roman Catholicism in March 1846. Her religious experiences contributed to her eight successful novels, which combined religious sentiment with sensational elements, and the topic together with her style caused controversy. Fullerton also wrote biographies of Catholic subjects such as St. Frances of Rome (1855) and Louisa de Carvojal (1873). Her close friend, the French writer Mme. Augustus Craven (1808-91) wrote her first full-length biography, in French. Fullerton also engaged extensively in philanthropy, and gave most of the money she earned from her writing to charity. She co-founded the religious community of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God Incarnate.

The author of the biography has not been identified.

This biography serves as a supplement to Mrs. Augustus Craven's biography of Fullerton, translated from the French by Henry James Coleridge (1822-93). It is formed mostly of autobiographical writings and religious and theological reflections. The biographer

considers the Catholic Church's careful regulation of their saints, and uses the biography as a step towards the examination of Fullerton's saintly condition.

201.

Carey, Rosa Nouchette, *Twelve Notable Good Women of the XIXth Century* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1899).

380pp.

Collective biography: the Majesty the Queen, Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, the Princess of Wales, the Duchess of Teck, Sister Dora, Agnes Weston, Grace Darling, the Princess Alice, Lady Henry Somerset and Frances Ridley Havergal.

Rosa Nouchette Carey (1840-1909): novelist. Carey was a friend of Mathilde Blind (1841-96) and Ellen Wood (1814-87). Her novels, of which she published thirty-three, are pious and domestic, and contain somewhat uninspired and uninspiring female characters. She also wrote stories for young girls, in a manner that recalled the work of Charlotte Yonge.

Carey's choice of subjects veers towards the aristocratic, in contrast to the many works of collective female biography that chose more 'imitable' models. The introduction celebrates the output of the Victorian era in such women. The sketches are often drawn from previously existing biographical works, sometimes closely paraphrasing them.

202.

Knapp, William I. *Life, Writings, and Correspondence of George Borrow, derived from official and other authentic sources* (London: John Murray, 1899), 2 vols.

Vol. 1: 402 pp. Vol. 2: 404 pp.

George Henry Borrow (1803-81): traveller and writer. Borrow was born in Norfolk, the son of an army Captain, and lived a rootless existence during the Napoleonic wars. Borrow was uncertain of his vocation and began to produce translations from a wide range of European languages. He alternated between sojourns in London where he produced hack-work and periods in Norwich, interspersed with bouts of depression. He eventually found a point of stability with the British and Foreign Bible Society, who sent him throughout Europe to circulate biblical works. Published accounts of his travels were successful. Later works, combinations of fiction, autobiographical reminiscence, travel writing, satire and social commentary, *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857) perplexed readers and critics, and his later works met with little favour.

William Ireland Knapp (1835-1908): American scholar, translator and writer. Knapp taught at Vassar from its foundation and held the Chair of Modern and Ancient Languages between 1865 and 1867. He travelled to Europe where he lived until returning to America to teach at Yale in 1877, and becoming Head Professor of Romance Languages at the University of Chicago in 1892. Like his subject George Henry Borrow, Knapp was interested in foreign languages, and published French and Spanish language guides and translations. Knapp also edited later editions of Borrow's works, including *The Romany Rye* in 1900 and *Lavengro* in 1911.

The work is interesting as an example of the trend of biographies that celebrated local, rather than national, talents. The biographer travels to Norwich to saturate himself in his subject's environment, and believes that 'something in the atmosphere of Norwich' would 'disclose Borrow' – oddly, for a subject who travelled as extensively as did Borrow, and from the perspective of an American biographer. The biographer is uncertain of his subject's future place in the annals of English literature, but robustly rounds on those who criticised him in the past.

203.

Plarr, Victor G[ustave] (ed.), *Men and Women of the Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries. Fifteenth Edition, Revised and Brought Down to the Present Time* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1899).

x + 1300pp.

Biographical dictionary containing over 1,560 entries.

Victor Gustave Plarr (1863-1929): librarian and poet. Plarr and his family, who lived in Strasbury, escaped to Scotland during the 1870-1 Franco-Prussian war. Plarr was educated at Oxford and specialised in modern history. He worked as a librarian at King's College London from 1890, and from 1897 at the Royal College of Surgeons, and has gone down in history as Monsieur Verog in his friend Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. Plarr's most important poetical work was *In The Dorian Mood* (1896).

In the preface, Plarr considers whether the existence of the *Dictionary of National Biography* justifies his own publication, and argues that popular demand proves its usefulness. The work is a kind of Who's Who of notorious contemporaries, and is not restricted to British subjects.

203.

[Anonymous] *The Bounder: The Story of a Man. By his friend* (London: Walter Scott, 1900).

223pp.

Edward Francis Fay [*pseudo.* The Bounder] (d.1896): journalist. Fay was an Irishman, who gained some education through his brother's time at Cambridge, though he never officially studied there himself. Fay first met Blatchford whilst the pair worked together on *Bell's Life*. Fay co-founded the socialist weekly *The Clarion* together with Alexander Mattock Thompson (1861-1948), Robert Blatchford and Blatchford's brother Montagu. Much of the brilliance of the writing was the work of Fay, who wrote under the pseudonym 'The Bounder'. His contributions included the novel *Strictly Proper*, which was serialized in 1893.

Robert Peel Glanville Blatchford (1851-1943): journalist and writer. Blatchford was born into a family of actors, but turned instead to a military career, which proved successful. He left the army in 1878 and began work as a timekeeper. He supplemented his income by writing and was helped by Alexander Mattock Thompson to establish himself as a journalist. He became a socialist and was a co-founder of the Manchester Fabian Society. Together with Thompson and his brother Montagu, Blatchford founded the socialist weekly *The Clarion*, which was successful in circulating socialist ideas. Some of his more controversial and unpopular views in the early nineteenth century isolated him from growing labour organisations.

This is an unusual example of nineteenth century biography. The biographer states that the work is not intended for the general public but for readers of the *Clarion*. There is little attempt to depict the subject before the time when he met his future biographer. It is an account of a friendship, in which the biographer positions himself as a Boswellian figure jotting down his companion's remarks. Blatchford justifies his curious work by dismissing the 'formal kind of biography' that gives little real sense of the subject, and is keen to dispose of 'externals'. The work is divided into three parts: 'Biographical', 'The Bounder as a Man' and 'The Bounder as a Writer'. The work is useful in illustrating contemporary attempts to play with the generic boundaries of biography.

204.

Carus-Wilson, Mrs. Ashley, Irene Petrie: *Missionary to Kashmir* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900).

xxiii + 343pp. Photograph of the subject. Reprinted in 1901 and 1955.

Irene Eleanora Verita Petrie (1864-97): missionary in Kashmir. Petrie grew up in London in a relatively wealthy family. She was a talented student and combined an interest in the arts with philanthropic and religious work. She applied for missionary work in 1891 and sailed to India in 1893, and relocated to Kashmir. She taught at Church Missionary Society schools and visited local women. She died of fever in the Ladakh region of the Himalayas.

Mrs. Ashely Carus-Wilson [*née* Mary Louisa Georgina Petrie] (-1935): biographer and religious writer. Of Scotch descent, Carus-Wilson, the daughter of a colonel, was educated in Surrey, England. She studied at University College London and was awarded a BA in 1883. She married Mr. Ashley Carus-Wilson, a professor of electrical engineering in Montreal, ten years later. She devoted herself to studying the Scriptures and promoted teaching by correspondence by founding The College Post. Carus-Wilson lectured extensively on missionary and religious topics, and published, amongst other works, *Clews to Holy Writ; or The Chronological Scripture Circle* (1894), *The Medical Education of Women* (1895) and *Thora: Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century Woman* (1896). Irene Petrie was her sister.

The biography is competently written, with numerous anecdotes and illustrative episodes. It is slightly monotonous in its litany of praises, but, well-researched, and it is of significant in providing in-depth background and contexts to missionary activities and the countries visited by Petrie. It is intertextual, with numerous references to other missionary biographies, and suggests the role of biography in sustaining the missionary community. There is a strong awareness of the stereotypes of missionary lives and an effort is made to distinguish between romantic preconceptions and the realities of such a vocation. The value of plain lives is stressed. The biographer somewhat curiously speaks of herself in the third person. It is undoubtedly one of the better biographies of female missionaries.

205.

Clodd, Edward, *Grant Allen: A Memoir, with a bibliography* (London: Grant Richards, 1900).

222pp. Photograph of the subject.

Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen (1848-99): science writer and novelist. Allen was born in Canada, the son of an Irish clergyman. When he was approximately fourteen his family moved to France, where Allen studied, followed by England, in Birmingham. After studying at Oxford, he found employment as a schoolmaster in England and, later, in Jamaica. He published articles on science, and travel pieces. His scientific essays were praised by Charles Darwin and T. H. Huxley. Allen later began contributing, to leading periodicals, novels and poems that sold well, and often included satires of the age. Allen is today remembered for his novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), which was a founding work of the 'new woman' genre of novel. Allen also published the didactic collective biography of men from humble life, *Biographies of Working Men* (1884 – see above).

Edward Clodd (1840-1930): banker, anthropologist and writer. Too a large extent self-educated, Clodd was led to question his early Baptist faith, closely followed religious and evolutionary debates and lately became an agnostic. He was admitted to the Royal Astronomical Society in 1869. Clodd published extensively on scientific matters, often in an accessible form or aimed at children. His circle of friends included T. H. Huxley, Edmund Gosse and Leslie Stephen. Clodd was a close friend of his subject Grant Allen.

The biography is fairly traditional and straightforward, though unusual in omitting chapter divisions and proceeding as a single narrative. Nor does the work rely heavily on letters, as Clodd attempts to bring the subject into a more direct contact with the readers, and even reprints some of Allen's letters as facsimiles. The particularity of the work resides in part in the biographer's tendency to consider psychological and sociological developments in order to analyse his subject, and justifies analysing Allen's genealogy with references to contemporary debates on heredity. The conclusion accepts that Allen's life may not survive, but that the biography may be of value if only to his contemporaries.

206.

Isaacs, Albert Augustus, *A Biographical Sketch Relative to the Missionary Labors of Emma Herdman, in the Empire of Morocco* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1900).

134pp. Photograph of the subject.

Emma Herdman (1844-1896): missionary in Morocco. Herdman was born in Ireland, and spent her teenage years on the Continent in order to gain a good knowledge of modern languages. She accompanied her mother to the North African Coast in 1884 and began missionary work in Tangier. She worked for the North African Mission as an "Honorary Missionary" until her death.

Albert Augustus Isaacs (fl. 1853-1900): miscellaneous writer. Isaacs principally wrote religious works, such as *A Pictorial Tour in the Holy Land* (1862), a *Biography of the Rev. H. A. Stern* (1886), *The Cottage Tracts* (1853), *The Dead Sea* (1857) and *The Fountain of Siena. An episode in the life of John Ruskin* (1900), together with numerous sermons.

The biography narrates the life of its subject with simplicity and little depth. It does not rely too heavily on quotation and letters, and its principal interest lies in its assessment of the colonial benefits of missionary work, as the biographer slips between the past (and Emma's life) and the present.

207.

Marshall, Beatrice, *Emma Marshall: A Biographical Sketch* (London: Seeley and Co., 1900).

vi + 342 pp. Reprinted in 1901.

Emma Marshall [*née* Martin] (1828-99): novelist. Marshall was raised by a Quaker family in Norfolk, and was later baptised into the Anglican Church before moving to Bristol. She became acquainted with John Addington Symonds and began a correspondence with Longfellow. She married Hugh Marshall, a bank clerk, and began to write for financial gain following the failure of his bank in 1878. Marshall authored numerous popular domestic novels, of which the most popular was *Life's Aftermath* (1876) and over 200 didactic tales, partly inspired by Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901). She also raised nine children, engaged in charitable activities and campaigned for women's rights. Marshall was eventually forced to apply to the Royal Literary Fund for pecuniary relief.

Beatrice Marshall [Emma Beatrice Marshall] (1861-1944): novelist, biographer translator. Marshall authored a novel, *An Old London Nosegay* (1903) and translated a number of works from German. Other than a biography of Emma Marshall, Beatrice published the memoirs of Lady Fanshawe (1625-80). Beatrice Marshall was the daughter of Emma Marshall.

The biographer enjoys exploiting the opportunities for anecdote and gossip provided by Marshall's acquaintance with literary figures, and favours such scenes over any critical engagement with Marshall's works. The biography provides a frank portrayal of a woman

writing out of financial hardship, combined with domestic cares, and celebrates the writer's ability to combine professional and maternal work.

208.

Stephen, Leslie, *George Eliot* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1902).

vi + 213pp. Reprinted in 1903, 1913, 1919, 1923 and 1926.

George Eliot [Mary Ann, later Marian, Evans] (1819-80): novelist. Eliot worked as an assistant editor to the *Westminster Review* and had translated Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1854) before achieving fame as a novelist with *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Adam Bede* (1859). Though her later novels *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1862-3), *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* (1874-6) divided critical opinion, they confirmed her status as one of the age's leading novelists. Eliot's unmarried relationship with the writer George Henry Lewes (1817-78) caused some controversy, as did her short marriage to John Walter Cross (1840-1924), younger by twenty years, and her future biographer.

Leslie Stephen (1832-1904): critic, biographer and editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1882-1901). Stephen is representative of many multi-tasking, prodigiously prolific Victorian men of letters. Though he gained recognition as an eighteenth-century scholar, he is most famous, other than as the father of Virginia Woolf, for his editorship of the *DNB*, which he began in 1882, and from which he resigned in 1891. He has been rather unfairly identified with the stuffy conception of Victorian hero-worshipping biography and can more appropriately be seen as a transitional figure between Victorian and Modernist biography.

This is the fourth full-length biography of George Eliot, after the lives published by John Walter Cross (1885 – see above), Mathilde Blind (1883 – see above) and Oscar Browning (1890). The work formed part of the inappropriately named 'English Men of Letters' series. It conforms to the series' intention of providing hurried readers with a good overview of the subject and, well written, it reads somewhat like an extended *DNB* entry. Stephen pays close attention to both Eliot's intellectual growth and the qualities and weaknesses of her writing. The tone is the tongue-in-cheek and sarcastic one that Stephen frequently adopted, though there are perhaps an unnecessarily large number of asides on feminine behaviour. It is the most scholarly of the early George Eliot biographies.